

ZOROASTRIAN ELEMENTS IN VĪS U RĀMĪN

by

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Abstract of the dissertation

The Persian poem Vīs u Rāmīn is known to be based on a lost Pahlavi written text, which represents in its turn a minstrel poem that has been traced back to a Parthian origin. The obvious Zoroastrian elements in the Persian poem have been briefly mentioned by commentators, but it seemed probable that close scrutiny would produce more such material. In fact it has proved possible to show in some passages close verbal dependence on the Pahlavi version, and to bring to light references to the Zoroastrian divine beings which had previously been overlooked, as well as certain precise Zoroastrian traditional details. Some at least of this material, it has been argued, must derive from the original Parthian minstrel poem, since it is essential to the plot. The results of the investigation thus contribute to knowledge of Zoroastrian society and literature at a remote and little-known period of Iranian history.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introductory

The romantic love story 'Vīs u Rāmīn' has come down to us through Fakhr-ad Din Gurgani's Persian poem composed between 1040 and 1054 A.C.¹ At the beginning of this poem Gurgani tells us how he came to know the story. He says that it was 'a beautiful story compiled by six wise men'. But, he says, not everyone could easily read the script, Pahlavi, in which it was written, or if they did, could understand the meaning. 'In these parts (Isfahan) people read that book in order to learn Pahlavi from it.'²

It thus appears that 'Vīs u Rāmīn' was in origin part of the pre-Islamic oral poetry of Iran, recited to music and without the ornament of rhyme; and that it survived the oblivion into which most such poetry fell by being written down, presumably in the period after the Arab conquest, since it seems that in Sasanian times poetry was not recorded. The work gained new popularity in Gurgani's rendering, and a Georgian translation was made of this, possibly as early as the thirteenth century A.C.³

The anonymous author of the 'Mujmal at-tavārīkh' locates the story in the time of the second Sasanian king Shābuhr, son of Ardashīr. But V. Minorsky's study of the geographical locations, political background and other data has shown that the story is of Parthian origin.⁴ There are Sasanian

elements in the poem, such as NŌ Rūz falling in the month of Ādar, and a six-day Mihragān Feast,⁵ but it is apparent that the Sasanian version of this minstrel poem was only a re-handling of an older Parthian original.

In character 'Vīs u Rāmīn' is a courtly romance, which was presumably composed for the entertainment of Parthian nobles and their ladies. The occurrence of the Parthian word gōsān 'minstrel' twice in Gurgani's poem, and an associated form three times in the Georgian one, testifies to this earliest tradition.⁶ Then, gaining popularity, the story was evidently retold later by Sasanian minstrels in their turn, and so passed down into Islamic times in a Middle Persian version. Archaeological and literary evidence has shown that the Parthians, like their successors the Sasanians, were Zoroastrians. The story thus originated in a Zoroastrian society, and was transmitted by Zoroastrians down the centuries, until it attained its final version in a work by a Muslim author. It is therefore a matter of considerable interest to examine Gurgani's poem for Zoroastrian elements which may have survived in his redaction. The most obvious of such elements have naturally already been noted by the editors and translators of the poem; but they have all come to it with a knowledge chiefly of Islamic Iran. It seemed probable therefore that more could be found out if the work were closely studied again with Zoroastrian beliefs and attitudes constantly in mind, and with the vocabulary

and idioms of Pahlavi literature for comparison.

The results of such a study have been striking; and it has not been surprising to find that the distinctively Zoroastrian elements appear markedly at certain crucial points of the narrative, where Zoroastrian beliefs and moral attitudes directly affect the course of the story, and where Gurgani seems to have been keeping closely to the original Pahlavi text. They are, however, absent from what appear to be his own extensions and elaborations. What has tended to mask this is that many Middle Persian words survive in Persian but with altered meanings; and one finds that Gurgani uses some of these words in the 'Zoroastrian' passages of his poem in their MP sense, but elsewhere in their later Persian significance. Sometimes it seems that he intends a deliberate word-play on the two senses, of which only a listener who knew something of the older language would have been aware. If, therefore, a modern reader takes such words throughout in their Persian sense, the specifically Zoroastrian character of particular passages is largely lost. This is the case generally in the published English version. Examples of such instances will be given throughout the following pages, but the general proposition may be illustrated at once by a few examples.

A basic Zoroastrian doctrine is that Ahura Mazdā created this world with a purpose, in accordance with the cosmic principle of asha, i.e. order, truth, righteousness; and one

word used in the Avesta for his act of creation is viḍāraya-, which means 'arrange, regulate' rather than 'make'.⁷ A Pahlavi synonym for this verb is ārāy-, whose original sense is preserved in a very few Persian compounds, e.g. saf-ārāyī 'marshalling of ranks (in battle)', gul-ārāyī 'arranging of flowers'. Otherwise it has developed the meaning of 'making beautiful, adorning', while its cognate, pīrāy-, has the sense of 'trimming, tidying'. A line from the story Mahmūd va Ayāz is used as a standard mnemonic for this distinction between the two verbs: ārāstan-i sarv ze pīrāstan ast 'one makes a cypress beautiful by trimming it'; and Gurgani himself uses them together in one couplet in a similar way:

p.327.9 do zulf u abrovānash-rā be pīrāst
 bunāgūsh u rukhānash-rā byārāst

'She trimmed her two tresses and her eyebrows
 [And] painted under her ears and her cheeks'.

In another, strongly religious, passage, the verb ārāy- occurs, however, in a very different meaning. Here the king Mōbad, speaking of God, says:

p.47.40 chunān kaz rāstī gītī byārāst

'Even as He arranged the world in accordance with
 righteousness'

This appears to be a close rendering of the lost Pahlavi; but the Zoroastrian sense of purposeful creation which it conveys is lost in the English rendering of gītī byārāst, according to the later sense of the verb, as 'made the world

glorious'.⁸ In another line of his poem, which also probably depends closely on the Pahlavi, Gurgani has Vīs utter the words:

p.348.34 bedān īzad ke gītī gerd kardast

'By the God who has brought the world together'
Here gītī gerd kardast appears to have the same essential meaning of having assembled the earth from existing matter.

There are other instances in the poem (notably with 'Mihr/mihr'), where translation according to Persian usage even more markedly obscures the Zoroastrian tenor of a passage. These will be considered in due course. But the following lines show how an indirect reference can be lost in translation. Early in the story when Vīs and Rāmīn talk to each other for the first time, Vīs expresses her doubts about his loyalty and says:

p.158.52 begardad sāl u mäh u tō begardī

pashīmānīt bāshad zīn ke kardī

53 agar paymān chunīn khwāhadt būdan

che bāyad īn hame zārī nemūdān

'The year and the month will turn and you will change,
[And then] you will regret what you have done.
If this is how your pact will be,
Why should you do all this lamenting?'

Then Rāmīn swears that his pact will never be weakened,

p.159.74 ke tā bādī vazad bar kūhsārān

va yā ābī ravad bar jūybārān

75 namānad bā shab-i tīre syāhī

napūsad dar darūn-i jūy māhī

76a ravesh dārad setāre āsman bar ...

'As long as the wind blows on the mountains,
Or water continues to flow in the streams,
Darkness of the night does not last,
Fish do not rot within brooks,
Stars move in the sky ...

And then it seems almost certain that in the next half-line, which concludes this passionate asseveration by so many permanent phenomena of the natural world, he must mention the sun, which is never overlooked, especially since this meeting takes place in daytime (p.156.12). So he goes on to say,

76b hamīdūn mihr dārad tan be jān bar

This means 'as long as Mihr has a body (i.e. the sun) for his soul'.⁹ This expression was presumably used in the Pahlavi original so that a reference could be made both to the sun and to Mithra, the yazata. For this is an oath of loyalty which Rāmīn is making, and a very important one for him, that supersedes all others. Any oath of loyalty is naturally the concern of Mihr, who shows himself as the soul (jān) of the sun. One may compare the thought in the Mihr Yasht (v.142): 'Mihr in the morning lights up his body'.¹⁰

It is not at all likely that mihr here means 'love', for the idea of the pact is further emphasized in Rāmīn's next words:

p.159.77 nagardad bar vafā rāmīn pashīmān
na hargez beshkanad bā dūst paymān

'Rāmīn will not regret his loyalty,

Nor will he ever break his pact with his beloved.

Gurgani cannot have been unaware of the religious significance of this pact; for even now, nine centuries later, there exist folk songs of love such as one that contains the following lines:

biyā berīm shāh-i cherāgh ahdī bebandīm

har kudūm ahd beshkanīm kamar nabandīm

'Let us go to 'Shāh-i Cherāgh' and make a pact
whichever of us breaks the pact should not wear
the belt.'

'Shāh-i Cherāgh', today a Muslim shrine, must have been originally a Zoroastrian one,¹¹ and the kamar is an obvious substitute for kustī, the badge of Zoroastrianism.¹² Even though the Zoroastrian reference is thinly veiled, the religious nature of the pact is not. Gurgani himself does not emphasize this element but it seems from his phraseology that he is aware of it. In other cases the use of words in their MP meanings carries no religious significance, but simply helps in identifying passages which seem particularly close to the Pahlavi text. One such word is faryād which occurs sometimes in its MP sense of ~~a~~-cry-for help, sometimes in its developed P sense of any loud outcry or lamentation, as is illustrated in the following citations. When the Roman emperor has violated a peace treaty, and begun to lay waste the land, a mob breaks into the Iranian king's presence:

p.230.15 khrūshān sar be sar faryād khwāhān
ze bīdād-i zamāne dād khwāhān

'Shouting one and all, asking for help,

Asking for justice against the injustice of the times'

Here (and on pp. 167.86; 169.119; 107.27; 396.103; 384.18)

faryād seems to mean 'help'. In other places (pp. 225.215;
 231.40; 188.11 and 499.29) the word is used in the P sense of
 any loud cry:

p.499.29 gurāz āshofte shud az bāng u faryād
be lashgargāh-i shāhanshah dar oftād

'The boar became confused by the noise and screaming,
 He fell upon the camp of the king of kings.'

p.280.116 kunam az bīdelī u bakht faryād
magar mādar marā bī bakht u del zād

'I cry aloud for being without my heart and without
 fortune.

Was I born of my mother without heart and fortune?'

Although faryād in the sense of 'help' could be used without
khwādan, as in the following instance:

p.420.124 be ātash-sūz gerd āyād hame kas
to ham faryād-i ātash-sūz-i man ras

'Every one gathers around a fire [to help put it out].
 You too come to the help of my fire (i.e. my burning
 heart)',

it is often accompanied by khwādan (call for) or khwāstan (ask
 for), and is associated with dād (justice) and bīdād (injustice),
 which bring to mind the ancient kings' hall of justice

(dāvargāh, see Mihr below). (In P the phrase dād u bīdād now has only the sense of noisy, indignant talk.)

Occasionally also a distinctive Pahlavi form survives, which likewise helps to identify passages where Gurgani is keeping close to his original. For example, dorostihā occurs once; it is a Pahlavi adverb used correctly by the poet to mean 'properly, rightly' (p.68.15); and doshkhwār 'difficult' appears once (p.223.184) instead of the standard P doshwār (pp. 115.145; 368.365). Both dorostihā and doshkhwār may be presumed to derive directly from the Pahlavi text. One also finds occasionally the Pahlavi construction of a possessive pronoun being suffixed to the first word of a clause, where in Persian it would be suffixed to the relevant noun, e.g.
p.276.49 hamī dānist kash rāmīn be bāgh ast

'She realized that Rāmīn was in her garden',¹³

Gurgani's handling of the subject-matter also suggests faithfulness to his original in all essentials, as we shall see when considering it incident by incident. His own contributions in this field appear to have consisted of expansion and elaboration, rather than in alteration or innovation; and in general his presentation is straightforward, with no critical comments, even when customs are involved (notably khwēdōdah) which run counter to Islamic morality. Only once, it seems, does he offer any condemnation of the ancient faith, and that is when he makes Vīs say, quite out of character:

p.443.529 agar sad sāl gabr ātash furūzad

ham ū rūzī bedān ātash besūzad

'If an infidel (gabr) kindles fire for a hundred years
Some day he will burn in that same fire (i.e. in
flames of hell).'

These words are so inappropriate in their context that it seems that Gurgani (if it was really he who composed them) inserted the line at random here from fear of general censure. In the main he appears to have involved himself sympathetically with the Zoroastrian beliefs and thoughts of his characters; and it is only at the very end of the poem that he asks the reader to pray for his soul, and to entreat God on his behalf not to punish him for having composed this beautiful story (p.512. 58-60).

All this being so, it is possible to hope to gain from the Persian 'Vīs u Rāmīn' a very fair idea of the essence of a Parthian romance composed by Zoroastrian minstrels for the pleasure of Zoroastrian hearers; and clearly the study is one well worth pursuing in all possible detail, since so little survives of a Zoroastrian literature of entertainment from any ancient period.

The plot of the poem can be reduced to fairly simple elements:

Mōbad, the high king, who lives in Marv, is promised the hand of Shahrō's unborn daughter. Shahrō is queen of Māh (Media). She bears a daughter, Vīs, and entrusts her to the care of a

nurse (dāye), who takes the girl to Khūzān and brings her back when she reaches a marriageable age. Forgetting her promise to Mōbad, Shahrō gives Vīs in marriage to her son Vīrō, Vīs' brother. Thereupon Mōbad fights and defeats Vīrō, and sends his younger brother, Rāmīn, to bring Vīs to Marv. Rāmīn and Vīs fall in love. They meet secretly with the help of the nurse. Mōbad discovers their love, and punishes Vīs and the nurse. For many years the two lovers live in fear of the king, but meet secretly as often as they can. Finally Mōbad dies, and Rāmīn becomes the king in his place and lives happily with Vīs as his queen for the remainder of their days.

Since there are many incidents and elaborations in this story, but comparatively few characters, the clearest way to examine the poem in detail has seemed to be to concentrate on the main characters, and to trace the occurrence of Zoroastrian elements as these appear in connection with them. A study of these characters will accordingly provide the framework for the first part of the following analysis.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. The edition of M. Minovi, Tehran 1935 has been used here. Another edition was published by M. Mahjūb, Tehran 1959. There is a French translation by Henri Massé, Le Roman de Wis et Ramin, Paris 1959, and an English translation by George Morrison, New York and London 1972.
2. Minovi ed., p.26.29 - p.27.59. For these lines see Minorsky, 'V u R I', 2-3, note 3.
3. There is an English translation of the Georgian text by Oliver Wardrop, Oriental Translation Fund, London 1914.
4. For a detailed consideration of the poem's origin see V. Minorsky, 'Vis u Ramin, a Parthian Romance', art. I, BSOAS XI (1946), 754-763; art. II, BSOAS XII (1947), 20-35; art. III, BSOAS XVI (1954), 91-92.
5. See S.H. Taqizadeh apud Minorsky, 'V u R II', BSOAS XII, 35; M. Boyce, 'On the Calendar of Zoroastrian Feasts', BSOAS XXXIII (1970), 527-528.
6. See M. Boyce, 'The Parthian gōsān and Iranian Minstrel Tradition', JRAS (1957), 10-45.
7. cf. Boyce, HZ I, 131, with note 4.
8. Morrison, 33.
9. Morrison, 110: 'and body has love in its soul'.
10. I. Gershevitch, AHM, 145.
11. 'Shāh-i Cherāgh' means literally 'king of the Lamp(s)', and is a common name for a small Muslim shrine in Shiraz. This type of shrine undoubtedly continues in Zoroastrian usage. Lamps are regularly lit at Zoroastrian shrines, see Boyce, Stronghold, 278 s.v. 'lamps'.
12. Vīs wears kustī (p.279.92).
13. Or 'she knew that her Rāmīn was in the garden', Morrison, 190; the ambiguity is characteristic of Pahlavi.

CHAPTER TWO

Mōbad

Mōbad is king of kings, ruling, in theory at least, over vassal kings. His name appears three times in the poem with an attribute written in Arabic script as mnyk'n.¹ This has been read as 'Manīkān' or 'Manēkān', 'i.e. descended from Manīk (Manēk), a name not directly attested either in Persian history or in epic tradition'.² This is clearly not very satisfactory; and a more convincing interpretation would seem to be that mnyk'n represents a misreading of a Pahlavi *mrwyk'n (𐭣𐭥𐭥𐭥𐭥), with the ambiguous signs 𐭥𐭥 being taken for n instead of rw. (Thus the name of the first great Sasanian high priest appears in Arabic script as tnsr, but to judge from a name in the inscription of Shābuhr I on the Ka'ba-yi Zardusht it was written in Pahlavi as twsr, representing Tōsar, not Tansar, tnsr being a misreading.) A Pahlavi word mrwyk'n would have the meaning 'of Marv'; and Mōbad does indeed reside in Marv, his capital city.³ Against this explanation it can be said that in both the occurrences of 'Marv' in the surviving Pahlavi texts the place name is written with 𐭥 not 𐭥⁴; but there are well-attested instances of Pahlavi words which are written according to scribal choice with either form of the letter 'r' (e.g. the common ideogram for gōw- 'say'). Possibly, moreover, by the time the MP poem came to be written down, the meaning of *Marvīkān had been forgotten, and the scribe felt free to write the word as he pleased.

It is an interesting point that in 'Vīs u Rāmīn' the epithet follows the king's proper name without linking izafe, this being Parthian, not Persian usage.

The king's proper name has also caused perplexity, however, since 'Mōbad' is the Sasanian title of a Zoroastrian high priest (OP *magupati, Parthian(mogbed), and is not attested elsewhere as a personal name. One might suppose that it came about as a by-name for a very pious king (thus the devout Parthian king, Tiridates I of Armenia, is called a 'magus' in one classical source⁵); but in fact the picture of King Mōbad which is given in the poem is not one of a very estimable or devout man. On the contrary, his own vassals and even soldiers appear to regard him with contempt.⁶ Thus when Vīrō is engaged in battle with him over Vīs, a battle in which Vīrō's father Qārin has been slain, Vīrō says:

p.63.68 hanūz īn paykar-i vārōn be pāyast

hanūz īn mōbad-i jādū be jāyast

....

70 ke man zang az gohar khwāham zudūdan

be kīne ristkhēz ū rā nemūdan

71 jihān rā az badash āzād kardan

ravān-i Qārin az vay shād kardan

'Still this unrighteous figure is standing,

Still this sorcerer Mōbad lives.

....

For I wish to remove the stain from the jewel

In revenge to show him the resurrection,

Free the world from his evil

And satisfy Qārin's soul concerning him.'

Paykar means 'figure' (in this case embodiment), 'body', 'statue'. This meaning may be extended to include a design on cloth, and so a flag,⁷ but unless we can be certain that Vīrō, over heaps of dead bodies, is pointing at Mōbad's flag, we must assume that he is referring to Mōbad himself, who is the cause of the battle. For parallel usages cf. Firdosi:

pas ān paykar-i rustam-i shīr khwār

be burdand nazdīk-i sām-i savār

'Then they carried the 'person' of suckling Rustam
To the presence of Sām the cavalier.

and again:

yekī tīz khanjar bezad bar sarash

be khāk andar āmad sar u paykarash

'He struck him on the head with a sharp dagger,
His head and body fell unto the dust.'

Gurgani himself says in another passage:

p.41.34 chu mādar dīd rūy-i dukhtarash-rā

sahī bālā vu nīkū paykarash-rā ...

'When the mother saw the face of her daughter
Her cypress stature and beautiful body ...'

gōhar (jewel, pearl) is something pure, as in the following simile:

p.32.28 chu gōhar pāk u bī āhū u dar-khor

'Like a jewel pure, without fault and deserving.'

Asadi says:

be khūbī parī u be pākī gohar

'In beauty a 'pari' and in purity a jewel.'

Hence the resurrection (ristkhēz) that Vīrō intends to bring about will destroy Mōbad as an impurity, a sinner. This is the original Zoroastrian doctrine, which still prevailed, it seems, in Parthian times.⁸ The adjective which qualifies paykar, i.e. vārōn, derives from the frequently occurring Pahlavi abārōn 'unrighteous, wicked'. In a parallel usage Vīs, reproaching Rāmīn for having violated his oath of loyalty to her, says:

p.453.33 cherā karkī chunīn vārōne kirdār

ke nangast ar be gūyandash be goftār

'Why did you commit so wicked a deed

That it is shameful to speak of it in words?'

It is perhaps only natural that Vīrō, fighting Mōbad to defend his own bride, should thus accuse the king of being wicked; but to call him 'sorcerer' seems less easily explicable. However, we find other vassal-kings of Mōbad also treating him with disrespect. Thus, although they all gather duly at his Nō Rūz feast, they did not, we are told, fully acknowledge his authority in their own provinces, as his brother Zard learns when he journeys to Māh. He reports to Mōbad:

p.54.44 to-rā naz shahryārān mīshomārān

grūhī khwad be mardat mī nadānand

'They do not count you among kings,

Some do not even regard you as "mard".'

This last word, literally 'man', has connotations of possessing courage and liberality, qualities to be expected of a king, a member of the 'warrior' class; and this particular insult suggests the possibility that 'Mōbad' was a by-name given to a king who was not thought fit for the position he held.

This interpretation seems to be supported by Zard's further words to him:

p.54.45 grūhī mōbadat khwānand u dastūr
 chu khwānandat grūhī mōbad-i zūr

'There are some who call you "mōbad" and "dastūr",
 As there are some who call you the "false mōbad".'

'Dastūr' is another title given to a Zoroastrian priest with authority; and the word zūr 'false', common in Pahlavi texts, can be taken to imply the opposite of what is in accord with right order, asha. 'Mōbad-i zūr' might also imply that he acquired power by force, unjustly. This would be a NP interpretation of the term. Further, a high priest might be regarded by the laity as possessing mysterious powers, and so there may conceivably be a link between 'false high priest' and Vīrō's 'sorcerer'. The Persian word for 'sorcerer', jādū, derives from OIr yātu, meaning originally 'demon',⁹ and has kept overtones of evil. In the poem it is often used in connection with the characteristic Zoroastrian terms of ahriman and dīv.

The lines just quoted above are likely to derive directly from the Pahlavi original, because they are vital to the story, since they spark off the battle between the armies of Mōbad and Vīrō. In this battle, as we have seen, Qārin,

father of Vīrō and Vīs, is killed; and although Mōbad succeeds in securing Vīs as his bride, she refuses to let him approach her for a whole year, because she is mourning her father; and she persuades her nurse to make a talisman to keep him from her, since she cannot evidently trust to his finer feelings.

Mōbad is thus generally represented in a very poor light. Strict consistency in the portrayal of actions and character is perhaps hardly to be expected, however, in a minstrel poem of such long transmission; and there must have been a tendency at work to blacken Mōbad, as the rival in love of the hero Rāmīn. We should not therefore be too surprised by the fact that the poem proper begins with Mōbad presiding over a great spring feast, as a high king should, magnificently liberal and splendid, bestowing lavish gifts on the glittering court which has gathered round him from all over his realms to help celebrate it. One explanation for this initial royal dignity might be that then Mōbad still had his kingly glory (farr), which he lost through making the pact with Shahrō; but this does not explain why he is called a sorcerer (jādū). A different explanation, also dependent on this improper act, might be that this pact recalled other stories, in which a wizard appears to a man who cannot find a desired gift for his small daughter, or to a woman who cannot bear a child, solves the problem by sorcery, and in return extracts a promise, seemingly unlikely at the time to be fulfilled, that he will be given the girl in question when she is of age

(Shahrō has no daughter when she makes the pact). The promise is always forgotten and inevitably the sorcerer appears at the door of the girl at the most critical moment of her life. It is likely that Mōbad's part in the romance invites confusion with the sorcerers of other tales. The fact that he is himself a hapless victim of the nurse's witchcraft tends to show that calling him a sorcerer is only an elaboration of his bad reputation; no specific act of sorcery is ascribed to him. Yet if the pact with Shahrō was held to contain an element of black magic, this would justify the sympathetic treatment of Vīs and Rāmīn in the story.

Nō Rūz and Mihragan

The passage concerning Mōbad's spring feast is likely to derive directly from the Parthian minstrel poem.¹⁰ This passage embodies a delightful description of Nō Rūz celebrated as a Zoroastrian feast by the king and his people:

p.28.4 che khorram jashn būd andar bahārān
 be jashn andar sarāsar nāmdārān

....

p.29.6 guzīde har che dar īran buzurgān
 az āzarbāygān u ray u gurgān

7 hamīdūn az khorāsān u kuhistān
 ze shīrāz u sifāhān u dihistān

....

p.30.24 agar che būd bazm-i shāh khorram
 digar bazmān nabūd az bazm-i u kam

25 kujā dar bāgh u rāgh az nāmdārān
 ze jām-i may hamī bārīd bārān

- p.30.26 hame kas rafte az khāne be sahrā
burun burde hame sāz-i tamāshā
- 27 ze har bāghī u har rāghī u rūdī
be gūsh āmad digar-gūne surūdī
- 28 zamīn az bas gul u sabze chunān būd
ke goftī pur-setāre āsmān būd
- 29 ze lāle har kasī rā bar sar afsar
ze bāde har yekī rā bar kaf akhgar
- 30 gurūhī dar nishāt u asb tāzī
gurūhī dar samā' u pāy bāzī
- 31 gurūhī may khwarān dar būstānī
gurūhī gul-chenān dar gulsetānī
- 32 gurūhī dar kenār-i rūd-bārī
gurūhī dar miyān-i lālezārī
- 33 bedān-jā rafte har yek khorramī rā
chu dība karde kīmokht-i zamī rā

'What a delightful feast it was in spring-time
 In the feast all the men of great name
 All the great men of Iran [were taking part]
 From Azarbayjan, Ray and Gorgan
 Likewise from Khorasan and Kuhistan
 And from Shiraz and Isfahan and Dihistan.
 Although the king's feast was delightful,
 Other feasts were no less than his.
 For in gardens and meadows great men
 Showered wine cups scattered as thick as raindrops
 Everyone had gone out from his house to the fields,

Taken out with him his accoutrement for enjoyment
 From every garden and meadow and river-bank
 One would hear a different kind of song,
 The earth was so full of flowers and green,
 That one would think it was the star-filled sky.
 Everyone had a crown of tulips on his head,
 Everyone had the glowing ember of wine in his hand.
 Some enjoyed galloping horses,
 Some listening to music and dancing,
 Some drank wine in an orchard,
 Some picking roses in a garden,
 Some sat on the banks of a stream,
 Some in the midst of tulips.
 Everyone had gone there for enjoyment,
 And had made the surface of the earth like brocade.'

Gurgani does not actually call the feast 'NŌ RŪz' but simply a 'spring feast'; there is scholarly debate about whether in Parthian times NŌ RŪz was in fact celebrated in spring or autumn. Elsewhere in the poem (p.44.24) there is a clear allusion to the late Sasanian NŌ RŪz in Ādar Māh, but this clearly belongs to the MP version.

Though Mihragān is not explicitly mentioned in the main part of the poem, Vīs sees Rāmīn at a feast which was evidently Mihragān, although in the text as we have it, it is Mihragān as a Sasanian feast, that is, a six-day festival, with 'Greater Mihragan' celebrated on the 6th day of the festival,

the day 'Rām'.¹¹ This feast too is described gloriously:

p.148.1 chu rūz-i rām shāhanshāh-i kishvar

be may benshast bā gurdān-i lasgar

2 sarāyash pur setāre gasht u pur māj

ze bas khūban u sālārān-i dargāh

'When on the day Rām the king of kings of the land
Sat down to drink wine with the generals of his army,
His palace became full of stars and full of moons
There were so many illustrious men and champions in
his court.'

Rāmīn enters Mōbad's camp to join the celebrations on the day
Rām (which Gurgani identifies with a Muslim touch, as a
Saturday):

p.502.22 be shādī rūz-i rām u rūz-i shanbad

frūd āmad be lashgar gāh-i mōbad

25 chu abrī būd dastash nobahārī

hamī bārīd durr-i shāhvārī

'In joy on the day Rām and the day Shanbad
He arrived at the military camp of Mōbad
His hand was like a spring cloud
Which rained regal jewels.'

Thus we have two important Zoroastrian festivals figuring
largely in the poem. Both are great occasions for joy. The
descriptions given in the poem agree with what we know from
Sasanian sources that all great men of the realm would attend
such feasts. The two feasts are both important to the story,
and figure largely and naturally in Zoroastrian life at all
epochs.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. pp.33.1, 34.31, 58.3.
2. Minorsky, 'V u R I', 754.
3. See ibid.
4. Ayadgār i Zarēran. Pahlavi Texts I, 3: 26
Shahrestānīhā i Ēran, Pahlavi Texts I, 19: 16
5. See apud Debevoise, A Political History of Parthia, 192.
6. See the text, p.496.11-12, and further below, p.33.
7. Hence Morrison, p.44: 'But yonder sinister flag still stands; still the sorcerer Moubad is in his place. For I shall wipe the stain from our escutcheon, and by vengeance make Qarin live again. I shall free the world from Moubad's affliction and gratify the soul of Qarin at his expense'.
8. See Boyce, HZ I, 242-3.
9. See Boyce, HZ I, 85.
10. Morrison, 19, note 3.
11. See Minorsky, 'V u R I', 747, note 2.

CHAPTER THREE

Shahrō

Years later Shahrō bears a daughter, Vīs, who grows up to be very beautiful. By this time Shahrō has quite forgotten the pact with Mōbad; and she decides that not only is there no match worthy of Vīs in all Iran except her brother Vīrō, but that bringing about a marriage between the nobly matched pair would be a good deed on her part and as such would bring her fortune. With this brother-and-sister marriage we encounter a characteristic Zoroastrian motif which is intrinsic to the plot.

Next-of-kin marriage, an established Zoroastrian practice, is attested for the Parthian period by the Avroman parchments, which were found in 1909 in a sealed jar near Avroman in Kurdistan. Two of these parchments are in Greek and one in Parthian. In the two Greek documents the dating formulas contain the throne name (Arsaces) of the reigning Parthian King of Kings and the names of his chief wives. In the older one these run: 'In the reign of the King of Kings Arsaces ... and the queens Siace, his compaternal sister and wife, and Aryazate surnamed Automa, daughter of the great king Tigranes and his wife, and of Azate, his compaternal sister and wife'.¹ Other brother-and-sister marriages are recorded among the vassals of the Arsacids, and their Zoroastrian neighbours. Gurgani accepts this custom as a fact and does not make any

Men gain renown through their own name,

If they live with valour and wisdom.'

This last line is an allusion to Mōbad's own poor reputation. Other evidence is provided by Mōbad telling Vīs that Shahrō has had some thirty-odd children, no two of them from the same husband (p.173.46), that every one of them were conceived in impropriety (p.173.48), and that only Vīs was descended from Jamshīd (Yima).

Since Vīs is Shahrō's last child and Qārin is her husband when he dies in the battle with Mōbad, and Vīs intends to mourn for him for a year, it seems safe to deduce that he is Vīs' father and not Vīrō's. This particular khwēdōdah marriage is thus one between a half-brother and sister. It would, one would think, have been an easy matter for Gurgani to alter this close relationship, of a type disapproved of under Islam, to a marriage between first cousins, which is wholly acceptable to Muslims. The fact that he did not do so seems part of his general faithfulness to the Pahlavi story in its essentials.

Shahrō's court astronomers choose the day 'Dai' of the month Āzar for the wedding, that is, a day during the season of Nō Rūz, held by Zoroastrians to be a time auspicious for marriages.² (Either Dai-pad-Azar, the eighth day of the month, or Dai-pad-Mihr, the fourteenth, would have fallen within the twenty one-day period of the festival.)³ On the chosen day, 'six hours after daybreak', i.e. at noon,

Shahrō, holding the hands of Vīs and Vīrō, comes out into the portico of the palace and, it seems, herself conducts their marriage ceremony:

p.44.27 basī kard āfarīn bar pāk dādār
pas āngah dīv-rā nefrīn-i besyār

28 sorūshān-rā be nām-i nīk bestūd
nyāyeshhā-yi bī andāze benmūd

'She uttered many blessings of the Holy Creator,
 And then many imprecations on the Div.

She praised the divine beings (sorūshān) by their
 auspicious names,

And uttered many long prayers.'

To bless Ohrmazd and to curse Ahriman is characteristic of the daily Zoroastrian 'kusti' prayers, which necessarily precede every religious ceremony; and these lines are probably taken almost verbatim from the original Pahlavi text, as a condensed account of the ceremony of marriage (although one may be reasonably certain that there priests would have appeared to conduct it).

The strikingly untraditional feature of these lines, is the term used for the Zoroastrian divinities, namely 'sorūshān', i.e. the plural of the proper name of the yazata Srōsh or Sraosha. He was the only Zoroastrian divinity whose name remained in Muslim Persian literature as that of an angel or messenger of God; and accordingly Gurgani appears to have used it in the plural to render either the Pahlavi plural yazdan (this being used in Persian as a singular for

God Himself), or the unfamiliar Amahraspandān. The same usage appears again in the poem in the imagery of a battle scene, when the clamour evokes the following simile:

p.58.22 va yā dīvān be gardūn bar dāvidand

ke āvāz-i sorūshān mīshenīdand

'Or as if divs (demons) were running away up to the sky

For they could hear the voices of the "sorushes".'

Sorūsh in 'Vīs u Rāmīn

Although in both the above passages 'sorūsh' is used in the plural as a common noun, in others where the word appears in the singular it is clear that Gurgani's 'sorūsh' represents a proper name in the Pahlavi original, that of the great yazata himself. Thus in this wedding ceremony Shahrō, having prayed, says to Vīs and Vīrō:

p.44.32 gavātān bas buvad dādār-i dāvar

sorūsh u mäh u mihr u charkh u akhtar

'For witnesses it is enough that you have the judging

Creator,

Sorūsh and Mihr, and the moon, firmament and stars.'

Here it seems likely that in the Pahlavi text the divine witnesses invoked for the covenant of marriage were in fact simply Mihr the Judge and his constant companion Srōsh.

Thus in one of the Persian rivāyats sent from Iran to the Parsis, the statement occurs: 'If there is a religious affair and if any deficiency arises in it, then there is a disgrace before Mihr the Judge (Dāvar-i Mihr) and Srōsh'.⁴ Gurgani most probably understood Pahlavi dādbar 'judge' as referring

to God Himself, and so supplied the word dādār 'Creator'; and then, since in Persian the common noun mihr has for one of its meanings 'sun', he sets the moon before Mihr, and passes on to mention the firmament and stars, thus himself obscuring the characteristically Zoroastrian nature of the passage. This obscuring is increased in the English translation, where 'sorūsh' is rendered as if here too it were a plural: 'The just Creator is enough as your witness - the angels, moon, and sun, heaven and stars'.⁵

Another passage in which the yazata Srōsh clearly appears occurs much later in the poem, at a point where Mōbad is shown pondering whether to lead his troops against Rāmīn:

p.496.11 gahī gofti ke gar bā vay bekūsham

nadānam chun dahad yārī sorūsham

12 sipāh-i man hame bā man be kīnand

be shāhī pāk rāmīn rā guzīnand

'Sometimes he would say: "If I fight with him,
I do not know how much support Sorūsh would give me".
My warriors are all angry with me

They would all choose Rāmīn as their king.'

Here in the English translation 'sorūsh' is rendered as 'guardian angel',⁶ and the king's reflections lose much of their force. In order to be victorious over Rāmīn, Mōbad needs to have the support of the yazata Srōsh, both as the close associate of Mihr, who aids just fighters, and in his own capacity as the master of righteousness (ashahe ratū-) and of the righteous man. This support Mōbad cannot be sure

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of having, for it is his own intemperate behaviour and arrogance which have alienated his warriors, and which, he evidently fears, will lead Srōsh to abandon him.

The yazata appears also in an episode between Mōbad and Vīs. The king has found Vīs at night in the garden of a castle, after Rāmīn, who had been with her, had fled at his coming, leaping over the wall. The king naturally demands an explanation of her presence there, and she says that she had been lonely and unhappy in the castle and had cried to God and complained of Mōbad's cruel and unjust treatment of her; and that in that sorrow she had fallen asleep:

p.291.159 be khwāb andar farāz āmad sorūshī

javānī khūbrūyī sabz pūshī

'In my sleep a sorūsh appeared to me,

A good-looking youth clad in green.'

Here again Gurgani himself obscures the meaning of the Pahlavi original by speaking of 'a' sorūsh; but clearly in the Zoroastrian version it would have been Srōsh himself, lord of this world and the link between God and man, who, Vīs says, appeared to her. In her dream, she declares, he came to her to redress injustice. He brought her out of the castle, placed her on a bed of flowers, and set her lover Rāmīn beside her. The fact that she describes him as 'good-looking' (khūb-rūy) is in itself significant, for this appears to represent a Pahlavi rendering of Sraasha's standing Avestan epithet huraōda- 'of fair form', with which the yazata is

invoked at the beginning of every karda of his yasht (y.57):
sraosham ashīm huraōdam ... yazamaide. It is not surprising
 that Sraosha should be 'of fair form', since he is the
 embodiment of the sacred word, tanumanthra-; and elsewhere
 we find that Gurgani, depending no doubt on his Pahlavi
 original, uses his name as a metaphor for beauty, when he
 says of Gul:

p.320.83 javābash dād khurshīd-i sukhān-gūy
sorūsh-i delkash ān hūr-i parī rūy

'In reply said that speaking sun,

That delightful Sorūsh, that Pari-faced angel,'

Both here and in the incident in the castle-garden the English
 rendering has for 'sorūsh' simply 'angel'.⁷ In the
 latter incident Mōbad, a Zoroastrian living in the days of
 simple faith, accepts Vīs' story; and indeed it seems that she,
 awakened from sleep by his coming,⁸ may have half-believed
 it herself; for if she had simply invented a tale to escape
 his anger, there was no need to mention Rāmīn at all, since
 he had already escaped unobserved.⁹ Dreams play a powerful
 and vivid role in Zoroastrian tradition, as a means by which
 the divine beings communicate with men; and Vīs may actually
 have had a dream of Srōsh, and attributed to his agency her
 joyful reunion with Rāmīn. True she had come down into the
 garden by her own physical efforts, knowing Rāmīn to be
 awaiting her there; but then she had searched long and
 anxiously for him in the dark, and it was not until the
 second part of the night - which is under the guardianship

of Srōsh - that the lovers at last met:

p.281.137 chu yek nīme sepāh-i shab dar āmad

mah-i tābande az khāvar bar āmad

....

140 padīd āmad mar ūrā yār-i khoftē

myān-i gel besān-i gul shekoftē

'When one half of the army of night had come out,

The shining moon rose from the east,

....

Her lover appeared to her, sleeping

In the middle of mud blooming like a flower.'

The story thus suggests how natural Zoroastrians felt the intervention of individual yazatas in their lives to be, as an answer to prayers for help. Similar beliefs about the intervention of Srōsh in particular have been recorded among Zoroastrian villagers of Yazd in recent times.¹⁰ These villagers moreover still often see yazatas in dreams, always as dressed in green (like Srōsh in Vīs' story) or in white.¹¹ This small point is an interesting illustration of the continuity of Zoroastrian tradition, in minor matters as well as in great.

The yazata Srōsh also appears twice in the poem in words spoken by the nurse to Vīs. At one point in the story the former says to the princess:

p.137.59 sorūshat sāl u mah andar kenār ast

be goftārat hamīshe gūshdār ast

p.137.60 sorūsh u bakht-rā chandīn mayāzār

be goftārī ke bāshad nā sezāvār

'Sorūsh is ever at your side,

Always listening to your words.

Do not offend Sorūsh and Fortune so much

By talk which is unfitting.'

The unfitting talk of which Vīs is guilty is lamenting and complaining against her fate - acts unworthy of a Zoroastrian, who, according to the moral teachings of the faith, thus encourages the demons despair and ingratitude. What is of particular interest is that the nurse in her rebuke links Srōsh with Bakht, Fortune; for it seems likely that Bakht here represents the Zoroastrian divinity Ashi, yazata of fortune, with whom Sraosha is regularly linked in the Avesta.¹²

In the English translation Sorūsh is rendered here as 'your angel',¹³ and explained in a footnote, unconvincingly, as 'the daēna, a heavenly counterpart to every mortal'. Not only is there no verbal justification for understanding Sorūsh as dēn, but the whole context is against this interpretation. The individual's dēn is passive, made beautiful or ugly by his deeds, but not capable itself of being offended by them, whereas the approval of mighty Srōsh is a weighty matter for every individual.

In the other passage where the nurse refers to Srōsh, she has just found an arrow shot by Rāmīn into the fortress called Ashkaft-i dīvan, literally 'Cleft of the demons', where Vīs is imprisoned. It brings a message of hope, and

causes her to exclaim:

p.244.37 sorūsh āmad sū-yi ashkaft-i dīvān

azū rōshan shud īn tārīk ayvān

'Srōsh has come towards the Cleft of the divs

And brought light to this dark castle.'

That the fortress of the 'divs' should be dark is understandable; and it is Srōsh, the yazata who presides over Ushahīn Gāh, who ushers in the first light of day. The metaphor is thus wholly Zoroastrian. It loses its force, however, in the English translation: 'An angel has visited Ishkaft ī Dīvān; this dark hall has become bright from its radiance!'¹⁴

There are other passages in classical Persian literature where Srōsh appears still with clear elements of his Zoroastrian concept, notably in the Shāhnāme, where he appears as a messenger of God to Kaykhosrow and to Khosrow Parvīz.¹⁵ Hafiz also speaks of him appearing in this capacity,¹⁶ and he comes thus to Zulaykhā in Jāmī's Yūsef u Zulaykhā.¹⁷ There is also a striking little incident in a story in Sa'di's Būstān. Here Khosrow Anōshīravān detects a man in his hunting ground who he thinks is an intruder. He prepares his bow and arrow to shoot him when the innocent man cries out to him that he is one of his own grooms, and that he knows every one of the king's horses by sight, and the king should not be less wise than one of his own servants. Anōshīravān, smiling with relief, replies:

to-rā yāvarī kard farrokh sorūsh

vagar na zeh āvarde būdam be gūsh¹⁸

'The glorious Sorūsh came to your help

Otherwise I had [already] brought the bow to my ear.'

Here clearly a Zoroastrian ruler is represented as speaking of the yazad Srōsh, 'who protects God's creatures from all evil'.¹⁹ This, and the references to Srōsh in Muslim Persian literature, appear, however, sporadically and in isolation, whereas in Vīs u Rāmīn such references are relatively numerous, and, when properly understood, contribute to establishing the Zoroastrian character of the original work.

Consideration of the appearances of Srōsh in the poem has led us far from the wedding of Vīs and Vīrō, when Shahrō called upon 'Sorūsh and Mihr' as divine witnesses. The noonday wedding ceremony was followed, as was fitting, by a splendid feast; but this suffered an ominous interruption. Mōbad has heard that Vīs is grown up, and of marriageable age; and he has sent his brother Zard with all speed to demand from Shahrō the fulfilment of their pact, long forgotten by her. At his orders, Zard actually rides in his haste into the queen's presence and delivers a letter to her from Mōbad without dismounting, and this, in more ways than one, makes him appear very ominous. His clothes are kabūd, that is, dark bluish-grey, his horse is black, and man and horse make a solid mass of threateningly dark colour, appearing at the wedding feast as a grim premonition of things to come. As if this were not enough, he proclaims to Vīs that his name

is Zard, i.e. yellow, an inauspicious colour for Zoroastrians. The nurse has earlier told her mother what Vīs thinks of the various colours, saying ke zard ast īn sizā-yi nābekārān, 'This is yellow, fit for people with no integrity',²⁰ and the princess now mocks the messenger for his inauspicious name. (Still today the Zoroastrians of Iran regard yellow as an unlucky colour, and avoid wearing it.)²¹

Rāstī

The letter which Zard brings to Shahrō introduces the characteristic Zoroastrian themes of righteousness (rāstī) and justice (dād) which are to run strongly through the whole poem.

Gurgani says of Mōbad's letter that:

p.47.38 sar-i nāme be nām-i dādgar būd
khudā-ī kū hamīshe dād farmūd

'The letter began in the name of the Just One,
 The God who ever ordered justice.'

The letter is then continued with the following lines:

p.47.39 do gītī rā nihād az rāstī kard
be yek mūy andar ān kažži nayāvard
 40 chunān kaz rāstī gītī byārāst
ze mardom nīz dād u rāstī khwāst

'He founded both worlds on righteousness
 He did not bring in one hair ['s breadth] of
 distortion (injustice)
 Just as he arranged the world through righteousness
 Of men too he required justice and righteousness.'

These lines give an account of creation so strongly Zoroastrian that they appear to have been translated directly from Gurgani's original source. All good things were created by Ahura Mazdā and nothing which has the slightest sign of 'crookedness' (kažži) may be connected with Him. This good creation is called the 'world of righteousness' ashahya gaēthā- by Zoroaster himself,²² (gaēthā-, P gītī, 'world'; rāstī is the Persian equivalent of asha). The characteristic Old Iranian concept of the act of bringing the world into being as one of 'arranging' it, i.e. bringing pre-existing matter into order, has already been discussed.²³

The next two lines of the letter are also distinctly Zoroastrian and in fact suggest an echo of the 'Asham Vohu' prayer with their repetitive praise of righteousness:

p.47.41 kasī kaz rāstī jūyad fozūnī

kunad pīrūzī ūrā rahnemūnī

42 be gītī kīmyā juz rāstī nīst

ke izz-i rāstī-rā kāstī nīst

43 man az tō rāstī khwāham ke jūyī

hamīshe rāstī varzī u gūyī

'One who seeks (contemplates) increase in righteousness
Victory will show him the way.

In the world there is no elixir (philosopher's stone)

other than righteousness,

For the glory of righteousness has no decrease.

I ask you to seek (contemplate) righteousness

Always to act and speak righteously.'

In this last line Mōbad is evidently reminding Shahrō of the threefold Zoroastrian ethic of good thoughts, good words and good deeds; for it seems that for Gurgani Persian justan can shade into meaning 'to think, to suppose, to contemplate', as is illustrated by the following verse from a later passage in the poem:

p.193.9 madān dūzakh bedān garmī ke gūyand

na ahrīman bedān zeshtī ke jūyand

'Do not assume hell to be as hot as they say,

Nor Ahriman as ugly as they contemplate (i.e. imagine him to be).'

When later in the story Mōbad discovers that Vīs, by then his wife, and Rāmīn, his brother, are lovers, he reproaches Vīs harshly in the following terms:

p.288.98 agar dar pīsh-i tō sūrat shavad dād

bekhwānad jānat az dīdānsh faryād

99 sar-i nīkī agar bīnī beburri

del-i pākī agar yābī bedarri

100 hamīshe rāstī-rā dushmanī tō

do cheshmash gar bebīnī bar kanī tō

'If justice should take form before your eyes,

Your soul would cry out for help at sight of it.

If you could see goodness, you would behead it.

If you saw purity, you would tear its heart out.

You are forever the enemy of righteousness.

If you saw it, you would gouge its eyes out.'

These are Ahrimanic qualities which Mōbad has ascribed to Vīs,

and he is well aware of this, for he sums up by saying:

p.288.101 to yek dīvi valīkan āshkāri

to yek ghūli valīkan chun negāri

'You are a demon, except that you are visible,

You are a monster, except that you look like a picture.

Evil powers in Zoroastrianism are not held to have material form of their own, although demons sometimes assume the form of beautiful maidens in order to deceive men. Mōbad thus accuses Vīs of being at heart a demon through her lack of righteousness and justice - rāstī and dād.

Later in the poem, Vīs, bitterly disappointed by Rāmīn's disloyalty to her with Gul, says in her despair:

p.365.320 delī mesl-i delat khwāham ze yazdān

syāh u sarkash u bad-mihr u nādān

'I ask God for a heart like yours,

Black, rebellious, unfaithful and ignorant.'

With these bitter words, which add up to nothing less than a Zoroastrian concept of a demon, Vīs in her despair commits the sin of calling a creature of God Ahrimanic, clearly the worst abuse one can utter. And her reproaches parallel those used against her by Mōbad:

Enemy of justice (dād) - bad-mihr 'unfaithful',²⁴

Enemy of purity (pākī) - syāh 'black'

Enemy of righteousness (rāstī) - sarkash 'rebellious'

(i.e. not guided by Sraosha, Obedience, the lord of

righteousness)

Enemy of goodness (nīkī) - nādān 'ignorant', unenlightened

(the quality of an irreligious heart).

Vīs' reason for wishing for such a heart is this:

p.365.321 khudāvand-i chunīn del raste bāshad

jihān az dast-i īn del khaste bāshad

'The master of such a heart must be free of all care
The world will be wounded (inflicted) through such a
heart.'

In her grief she wishes that she herself were wholly wicked, so that she could inflict pain without caring as Rāmīn does. Even though the sentiment is impious, the vocabulary and the concepts behind it are Zoroastrian; and the deeper implication is clear throughout, that the better path is to hold to righteousness and justice, so that none need suffer.

Shahrō, thus reminded of the pact made so long before, on a festive occasion, is stricken with remorse when she reads Mōbad's letter and realises what she has done. Her one real fault had been in the beginning, in rashly pledging the hand of an unborn daughter, and for this, Vīs, happy in her love for Vīrō, now bitterly reproaches her. Vīs also takes upon herself to dismiss Zard, who rides swiftly and grimly away.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. E.H. Minns, 'Parchments from the Parthian Period from Avroman', Journal of Hellenistic Studies, XXXV (1915), 31.
2. cf. Boyce, Stronghold, 172.
3. On the length of the Zoroastrian festival see ibid., 176, 235.
4. Unvala, Rivayat, II, 458; Dhabhar, Rivayat, 617.
5. Morrison, 31.
6. Ibid., 341.
7. Morrison, 201, 222.
8. See p.287.80.
9. See p.290.134-6.
10. See Boyce, Stronghold, 86-7.
11. For such green-clad beings, see ibid., 60, 71, 268.
12. E.g., Y.57.3; Yt.11.8.
13. Morrison, 95.
14. Morrison, 167.
15. Shāhnāme, III, 119; V, 162.
16. See A.J. Arberry, 'Fifty Poems of Hafiz', 43.3.
17. Jami, Yusef u Zulaykha, 67.
18. Sa'di, Bustan, in Kulliyat, 243.
19. Unvala, Rivayat, II, 182; Dhabhar, Rivayat, 167.
20. p.40.14.
21. See Boyce, Stronghold, 36.
22. Y.31.1.

23. See above, pp.7-8.

24. Morrison, 252, 'false in love'. On bād-mihr see
further below, pp.80-81 under 'Mihr'. /

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CHAPTER FOUR

Vīs

Vīs is represented to us as a true romantic heroine, exquisitely beautiful, and born under a fortunate star. Her lineage 'goes back to Adam', and she has been brought up with all the luxury and indulgence to be expected for a royal princess. Yet her education has clearly included a good religious training, and she speaks often and respectfully of dīn and dānish ('religion' and 'learning'). She has also, it is said, acquired some knowledge of reading and writing, for ke khwad dānist kam māye dabīrī 'she herself had a little knowledge of scribeman'ship' (p.333.76).

Reading, writing and composing were likely accomplishments for a Sasanian princess, and possibly - though not probably - already for a Parthian one. When she intends to send a letter back to Rāmīn, however, she calls in Mushgīn, the scribe.
p.346.112 galam bar gīr mushgīnā be mushgāb

yekī nāme nevīs az man be gūrāb

'Pick up your pen, Mushgīn, and the musk-water,
And write a letter from me to Gūrāb.'

She is eloquent. In her soliloquies she reveals that she is not only skilled in the art of singing, but can compose songs herself, and she is aware that her own love and fate will be the subject of others' songs:

p.337.143 alā ay āshiqān-i mihr -parvar
manam bar āshiqān imrūz mehtar

....

145 marā bīnīd hāl-i man nyūshīd
digar dar ishq varzīdan makūshīd

'O you lovers who nurture affection
 Today I am the leader of all lovers.'

....

'Look at me and listen to my story,
 And never again strive for love.'

She has, however, although high-spirited, been brought up to show due modesty and self-restraint; and at the beginning of her story, when her mother first speaks to her of marriage to Vīrō, she blushes without answering, and her mother rightly takes her silence for bashful assent. Later, when the nurse is trying to kindle love in her heart for Rāmīn, she protests:

p.129.101 marā shūkhī u bī-sharmī mayāmūz
ke bī-sharmī zanān rā bad kunad rūz

'Do not teach me immodesty and shamelessness,
 For shamelessness brings misfortune on women.'

Yet Vīs is doomed to misfortune by her mother's one rash act before she was born, for this had made her, unwittingly, party to a breach of faith; and ill luck begins to strike her the very day on which she dismissed Zard, on the grounds, as she says later to Mōbad, that she herself must keep the faith she has now plighted to Vīrō:

p.69.14 marā vīrō khudāvand ast u shāh ast

be bālā sarv u az dīdār māh ast

15 marā ū mehtar u farrokh barādar

man ūrā nīz joft u nīk khwāhar

p.70.26 vagar bā ū khwaram dar mihr zenhār

che uzr āram bedān sar pīshi-i dādār

27 man az dādār tarsam bā javanī

na tarsi tō ke pīr-i nā-tavanī

'Vīrō is my master and my king,

In stature he is a cypress and in looks, a moon.

He is my lord and my glorious brother,

I am his wife and good sister.

'And if I break my oath of loyalty to him,

What excuse will I give the Creator at the latter end?

I fear the Creator, though I am young,

Do you not fear Him, you who are old and weak?'

Yet this marriage, which she has entered into happily, unaware of any complications, is doomed not to be consummated; because on the evening of her wedding day her monthly period comes upon her, and so, by Zoroastrian purity laws, her newly wedded husband may not then approach her at all. Before the time of her ritual impurity is past, Vīrō has to leave her to fight Mōbad; and although he is victorious on the field, Mōbad succeeds, while he is still absent, in persuading Shahrō to yield Vīs to him.

Purity in 'Vīs u Rāmīn'

The Zoroastrian purity laws are founded in dualism, in the belief that Ahura Mazdā created this world wholly good and pure, and that Angra Mainyu brought imperfection upon it, which includes not only sin but all physical uncleanness and blemishes.¹ An impurity which is much discussed in the Vendidad and the Pahlavi books is women's monthly courses;² and Gurgani, in accepting Vīs' condition on her wedding night as a pivotal point in the story, shows himself fully aware of the working of Zoroastrian purity laws in this particular respect:

p.72.11 zan-i mugh chun barīn kirdār bāshad

be suhbat mard azū bīzār bāshad

12 vagar zan hāl azū dārad nihānī

barū gardad harām-i jāvdānī

'When the wife of a Zoroastrian is in this state
Man is loath to associate with her.

And if the woman conceals her condition from him,
She will be forever unlawful to him.'

Elsewhere Gurgani (probably following the Pahlavi original closely) shows awareness of the close link which Zoroastrians feel between cleanliness of body and purity of soul, when he has Vīs say:

p.334.104 ravam az har gunāhī tan beshūyam

vaz īzad khwīshdan-rā chāre jūyam

'I shall go and wash my body clean of any sin,
And seek a remedy from God.'

Elsewhere Rāmīn says:

P.216.55 marā az dāgh-i hejrān zard shud rūy

be may zardī ze rūy-i man frū shūy

56 may-i gul-gūn kunad gul-gūn rukhānam

zudāyad zang-i andīshe ze jānam

'The grief of separation made my face yellow (pale)

Wash this pallor off my face with wine

The red (fire-coloured) wine will make my face red,

It will remove the tarnish of grief from my soul.'

Here the grief and anxiety which are impurities of the spirit are to be washed away as if they were a rust upon the soul.

Vīs is very young and inexperienced when, in Vīrō's absence, she is surrendered by her mother to Mōbad, and is carried away, lonely and sorrowful, to the far north-east. On the long journey Mōbad's younger brother, Rāmīn, has a glimpse of her in her litter, and instantly falls passionately in love. He procures the nurse, who accompanies Vīs (and who had reared him also through his infancy) to plead his cause with her; but Vīs indignantly rejects the very idea of taking a lover. But as it happens Mōbad himself is kept forever from her, since the nurse's talisman, buried in earth and meant to be recovered after a year and made ineffective,³ is washed away by winter floods, leaving the king perpetually impotent. In these circumstances the nurse's wiles and persistence, and Rāmīn's own beauty (first glimpsed by Vīs at the great feast of Mihragān⁴) wear down her resistance; and once she has yielded to him, passionate love fills her whole being. As she declares eventually to Mōbad:

p.165.57 agar khwāhī bekush, khwāhī barāvīz

na kardam na kunam az rām parhīz

'Kill me if you will, hang me if you wish,

I have not given up Rāmīn, nor will I give him up.'

p.166.60 vagar tīgh-i tō az man jān setānad

marā īn nām dar gītī bemānad

61 ke jān bespurd vīs az bahr-i rāmīn

be sad jān mīkharam man nām-i chūnīn

'And if your sword should take my life away,

The world will remember my name saying:

"Vīs gave her life for the sake of Rāmīn",

I would give a hundred lives for a name such as this.'

p.166.67 marā naz marg bīmast u na az dard

bebīn tā ke che chāre bāyadat kard

'I fear neither death nor pain

See what course is proper for you to take.'

It is for Mōbad to decide what he should do, as for Vīs, she knows that her love for Rāmīn, in Gurgani's words, kār-i bāzī nīst 'is no light matter'. She is aware of the consequences of her love in the eyes of both her husband and her brother, two powerful men whom she is bound to listen to, and also as a sin before God. She tells Vīrō:

p.167.91 agar gūyī yekī zīn har do bugzīn

behesht-i jāvdān u rūy-i rāmīn

92 be jān-i man ke rāmīn-rā guzīnam

ke rūyash-rā behesht-i khwīsh bīnam

'If you should tell me to choose one of these two -
 The eternal paradise or the face of Rāmīn -
 Upon my soul I would choose Rāmīn -
 For I see his face as my paradise.'

Here, talking to her brother, whom she loves and respects, Vīs' tone is more intimate than when she speaks to Mōbad. Not only is she closer in relationship to Vīrō, but these lines seem to reflect Vīrō's own righteousness. Vīs answers Mōbad by rejecting his threats of killing and hanging, but to her brother she says if he asked her to choose between eternal salvation and Rāmīn, she would choose the latter. These strong statements should have made it clear to Mōbad that his locks and seals were not going to keep Vīs from Rāmīn, who is held in a similar state of ardent love; but he lets himself be deceived again and again.

At one point Mōbad decides to arrange an ordeal by fire for Vīs. He asks her, that is, to swear an oath before the religious authorities that she has no actual relationship with Rāmīn, and to bear witness to this oath by passing through fire:

p.194.132 bekhwar sōgand vaz tuhmat berastī
ravān-rā az malāmāthā beshustī
 133 kunūn man ātashī rōshan frūzam
barū besyār mushg u ūd sūzam
 134 to ānja pīsh-i dīndārān-i ālam
bedān ātash bekhwar sōgand-i mohkam

'Take an oath and you will be free of slander,
 Your soul will be washed clean of all reproach;
 I shall now light a blazing fire
 I shall burn much musk and aloe-wood on it.
 There before the religious men of the land
 Take a solemn oath at that fire.'

Here another characteristic Zoroastrian element appears in the development of the story.

The ordeal by fire, sōgand khwardan and solemn oaths

The use of the ordeal by fire as a judicial procedure, to test the validity of a solemnly sworn oath, was evidently regularly practised by the ancient Iranians. According to Biruni (who had access to good Zoroastrian sources) there was a tradition that Zoroaster himself underwent such an ordeal (in the form of molten metal poured on his breast), in order to attest the truth of his teachings to the Kayanian king, Gushtasp;⁵ and a similar form of the ordeal is said to have been undergone in historic times by the Sasanian high priest, Ādurbād i Mahraspandān, to attest his exposition of religious doctrine.⁶ In the Shāhnāme the prince Siyāvash chooses to prove his innocence from unfounded accusations by riding between two blazing mounds of fire;⁷ and it seems to be some ordeal of this kind that Mōbad intends for Vīs, for as she reports the matter, in terror, to Rāmīn:

p.197.24 marā gūyad be ātash bar guzar kun

jihān rā az tan-i pākat khabar kun

'He tells me "Pass through the fire

And let the world know of your chastity".'

Such ordeals were inevitably very dangerous. When Mōbad first asks Vīs to undergo one, her immediate reaction is to outface him by declaring her readiness, since (she claims) she is in fact innocent. Mōbad then proceeds to have the fire prepared, fetching embers for it from a fire temple (which underlines the solemn religious nature of the act):

- p.195.1 be ātash-gāh chīzī bī-karān dād
ke natvān kard ān rā sar be sar yād
 2 ze dīnar u ze gōharhā-yi shahvār
zamīn u āsyā u bāgh-i besyār
 3 guzide mādyānān-i tagāvar
hamīdūn gōsfand u gāv-i bī-mar
 4 ze ātash-gāh lakhtī ātash āvard
be maydān ātashi chun kuh bar kard
 5 basī az sandal u ūdash khuresh dād
be kāfūr u be mushgash parvaresh dād
 p.196.6 ze maydān ātashi chun kūh bar āmad
ke bā gardūn sar-i vay hambar āmad
 7 chu zarrīn gunbadī bar charkh yāzān
shude larzān u zarrash pāk rīzān

'He made endless donations to the fire temple,
 [So many] that they cannot all be mentioned,
 Of gold and precious jewels,
 Land, mills and many orchards,
 The finest swift mares.
 And numerous sheep and cattle.

He brought some embers from the fire temple,
 In the arena he built a fire as big as a mountain,
 Fed it with sandal-wood and aloes,
 Mixed with camphor and musk.
 A fire like a mountain rose from the arena
 Whose summit reached the sky
 Like a dome of gold reaching the firmament
 Trembling and its gold spreading afar.'

When Vīs, watching with Rāmīn from a roof-top, sees the great fire, she foresees death for herself, since she is in fact guilty; and with her lover and the nurse she flees hurriedly in the darkness. The reason why she felt certain of death was that before approaching the fire she would have had to take a solemn oath attesting her innocence, with invocation of the divinities who guard the covenant, above all Mithra; and since she would thus be perjuring herself, she would expect these divinities to let the fire destroy her in her wickedness. They would only intervene, it was believed, on behalf of the innocent, to save them from the heat of the flames.

The actual administration of the oath itself was regularly accompanied by a minor and symbolic ordeal by fire, that is, the ritual imbibing of a drink in which the fiery substance sulphur, sōgand, had been dissolved. This sulphur was thought gradually to consume the guilty inwardly, but to leave the innocent unharmed. So Mōbad says to Vīs: (p.195.34) bedān ātash bekhwar sōgand-i mohkam 'At that fire consume the mighty sulphur'. His words can also be translated, according to

Persian idiom, as 'swear a mighty oath',⁸ for sōgand khwardan 'to consume sulphur' has come to mean simply to 'swear an oath'. But the full sense of the expression was preserved for Zoroastrians by the fact that the judicial procedure which was involved survived within living memory, with the actual administration of a sulphurous drink before the oath of attestation was taken. Two separate and detailed accounts of the full procedure are preserved in the Persian Rivayats, with the title Sōgand Nāme or 'Formula of oath[taking]'.⁹ These give both the elaborate religious ritual which accompanied the administration of an oath, and alternate forms of the words to be spoken. One of these formulas contains the following lines referring to the words which the oath-taker is about to say: 'I draw upon myself the penalty of it at the Chinvat Bridge. Mihr, Sarōsh and Rashn know that I speak the truth; the spirit of Truth knows that I speak the truth; the Ameshaspands know that I speak the truth.'¹⁰

Some such formula of asseveration was clearly going to be demanded of Vīs; and at first, when she seeks to brazen out the matter, she says to Mōbad, as an innocent person might:

p.194.29 be paymān u be sōgandam matarsān
ke dārad bīgunah sōgand āsān
 30 chu dar zīrash nabāshad nā-savābī
che sōgandī khwarī che sard ābī

'Do not threaten me with pacts and 'sōgands',
 For the innocent hold 'sōgand' a light matter.

When there is no unrighteousness beneath

A drink of 'sōgand' is no more than a drink of cold
water.¹¹

The last line is reminiscent of the words spoken by Siyāvash
in the Shāhnāme:

chu bakhshāyesh-i pāk yazdān buvad

dam-i ātash u bād yeksān buvad

'When there is forgiveness by God

The hot blast of fire is the same as a breeze.'¹²

But knowing, despite her bold words, that she is guilty, Vīs
flees to avoid the ordeal.

Another oath-taking in the poem has a quasi-legal
character, and that is the original covenant entered into by
Shahrō with Mōbad. Shahrō then swears to the king that she
has no daughter, but that if she gives birth to one thereafter,
she shall become his bride. The verb used is again sōgand
khwardan,¹³ but it is not clear whether this has its literal
force here, or whether (more probably) it is simply used in
the modern sense of making a strong verbal asseveration.
The compact is, however, given a formal character by being
put in writing. Writing was used for administrative, and
no doubt legal, matters already in the Achaemenian period,
so this incident may belong to the original Parthian story.
The dry legal aspect of a written agreement is romanticised
by the words being set down in a mixture of rose-water and
musk, upon silk¹⁴; and there can be no doubt that at least

one of the yazatas - most probably Mihr - was invoked as witness, for when Shahrō unwittingly breaks the pact Mōbad

p.57.36 ze shahrō bā hame shāhān gele kard

ke bī-dīn chun shud u zenhār chun khward

'Complained of Shahrō to all the [vassal] kings,
Telling how she had abandoned religion, and how she
had broken her promise.'

He also accuses her directly of wickedness in these purely Zoroastrian terms:

p.77.13 cherā zān ahd u paymān bāz gashtī

cherā bā ahriman anbāz gashtī

'Why did you turn from that pact and covenant?
Why did you become a partner of Ahriman?'

Shahrō herself, the poet tells us:

p.49.83 ham az shāh u ham az dādār tarsān

ke beshkast in hame sōgand u paymān

'Felt dread of both the king and the Creator,
For having broken all those oaths and pacts.'

Subsequently, when Mōbad is wooing Vīs to marry him, he declares that if she will become his truly loving wife he will be utterly devoted to her, and will lavish on her all the wealth at his command. And he concludes his many protestations by saying:

p.68.15 bedīn paymān kunam bā tō basī band

dorostihā be mihr u khatt u sōgand

'For this pact I shall enter into many binding
conditions with you,
Duly by Mihr, both in writing and by "sōgand".'

Since dorostihā appears to be the Pahlavi adverb, 'duly, rightly, properly', for which Gurgani's own natural equivalent would have been be dorostī,¹⁵ it seems that the poet is here following his Pahlavi original closely. Accordingly be mihr can reasonably be understood to refer to the great yazata, and to mean 'by invocation of Mihr', he being the divinity before whom it was proper to swear pacts.¹⁶ The final words are presumably to be taken literally - that the king will both set down a written agreement and pledge himself to keep it by 'drinking sulphur', according to ancient practice. Many episodes later, Mōbad is forced to interrupt an apparent reconciliation with his wayward wife for the following reason:

p.229.10 shahanshah mōbad az qaysar khabar yāft

ke qaysar del ze rāh-i mihr bar-tāft

....

hame paymānhā-yi karde beshkast

basī kashā-yi mōbad rā frū bast

'Mōbad, King of kings, received news of Caesar,
That his heart was turned from 'the way of Mihr'.

....

He had broken all treaties between them, [and]
Imprisoned many of Mōbad's subjects.'

The English translation for del ze rāh-i mihr bar tāft is 'had turned his heart away from the path of affection'¹⁷; but it is hardly to be supposed that there had ever been 'affection' between a Parthian king and Roman emperor.

Rather, this appears to be a natural Zoroastrian way of saying that the foreign ruler had broken his treaty-obligations with Iran, thus offending the divinity who oversees covenants. Other oaths are taken in the poem which clearly are not set down in any legal form, or ratified by sōgand khwardan, but which are simply solemn asseverations, made with due invocation of divinities who are expected to punish the oath-taker if he breaks his word. The following strikingly Zoroastrian one is taken by Mōbad:

p.210.34 bekhward āngāh bā mādarsh sōgand
be dīn-i rōshan u jān-i khradmand

35 be yazdān-i jihān u dīn-i pākān
be rōshan jān-i nīkān u nyākān

36 be āb-i pāk u khāk u ātash u bād
be farhang u vafā u dānīsh u dād

37 ke bar rāmīn azīn pas bad najūyam
del az āzār u kirdārash beshūyam

'Then he swore an oath before his mother,

By the bright faith and the wise soul,

By the yazads of the world and the religion of the pure

By the bright souls of the righteous and [his]

ancestors,

By pure water and earth and fire and the wind,

By learning and loyalty and wisdom and justice,

That thenceforth he would not seek to harm Rāmīn,

But would wash from his heart [the memory] of his

wrongful acts.'

Here the description of the faith now as 'bright' and now as 'that of the pure' seems characteristic of Zoroastrianism, which has for its symbol of righteousness and purity the bright fire.¹⁸ Invocation of the 'wise soul' (jān-i khradmand) seems to be based on the essential doctrine embodied in Zoroaster's own words in Y.30.3: 'and of these two the wise choose rightly, not so the unwise'.¹⁹ The phrase yazdan-i jhān has been taken in the English translation in the modern Persian sense, i.e. 'God of the world',²⁰ but in a passage so evidently closely dependent on the Pahlavi it may well be Gurgani's version of Pahlavi yazdān ī gētīgān, while jān-i nīkān u nyāgān probably represents a misunderstanding by him of a Pahlavi phrase for the fravašis of the righteous. To swear by the inanimate 'creations' of water, fire and earth is characteristically Zoroastrian; but at some stage learned Zoroastrian priests became influenced by the Greek theory of four elements - earth, air, fire, and water - and adapted this to their own cosmology, but with 'wind' (bād), as here, for 'air' (for which there was no word in ancient Iran).

Other oaths are taken in the poem with invocation of natural things, that is (as the following words of Rāmīn suggest) by the good creations of Ahura Mazdā:

p.341.23 ... bekhwardam pīsh-i yazdān sakht sōgand

24 be har chīzī ke ān behtar ze gayhān

be khāk-i pāk u māj u mihr-i tābān

'... I have sworn a firm oath before God,

By all that is best in the world,

By the pure earth and the shining moon and sun.'

Earlier Rāmīn swears his truthfulness to Vīs with more detailed invocations:

p.159.71 nakhust āzāde rāmīn khward sōgand

be yazdān kūst gītī-rā khudāvand

72 be mäh-i rōshan u tābande khurshīd

be farrokh mushtarī u pāk nāhīd

73 be nān u bā namak bā dīn-i yazdān

be rōshan ātash u jān-i sukhan-dān

'First noble Rāmīn swore an oath,

By God who is the lord of the world,

By the bright moon and the shining sun,

By the glorious Jupiter and pure Nāhīd

By bread and by salt, by the religion of God [or

yazads],

by the bright fire and the soul with knowledge of

speech.'

To swear by planets is hardly Zoroastrian, since according to the learned men of that faith these heavenly bodies were^g daevic, wandering erratically in the skies; so presumably Mushtarī and Nāhīd have been added by Gurgani himself after 'sun and moon' (for which, naturally, exceptions had to be made by Zoroastrians). Bread and salt seem to represent hospitality which was so highly prized in ancient Iran, and which was hypostatized in the yazata Airyaman; and in this set of religiously inclined invocations the jān-i sukhan-dān 'the soul with knowledge of speech' perhaps refers to the soul illumined by Zoroaster's words - an invocation to be associated with jān-i khradmand.

The various oaths made in the course of the poem, as lovers and rivals passionately avow their intentions, thus contribute strongly to the general impression of a Zoroastrian society, in which men and women lived consciously in the good world of Ahura Mazdā's making, and under the watchful eyes of the beneficent but just yazatas.

All this has taken us away from the point in the story where Mōbad seeks to test Vīs through the ordeal by fire, and she flees into the night. The tale then continues to unfold in its episodic way, until we reach a point where Vīs has been incarcerated in an old castle of the city of Marv, under the care of her brother-in-law, Zard. From there she has written to Rāmīn, urging him to come to the castle, seize it, and challenge the power of Mōbad. She herself plans to meet Rāmīn at a fire-temple outside the castle, and by a trick to gain him admittance there. So she falsely tells Zard that her Fortune had come to her in a dream and had told her that her brother Vīrō had been ill but had recovered (p.490.29). Here 'bakht-am', 'My Fortune', presumably refers to her personal Khvarenah, Pahlavi Farrah.²¹ She then says:

p.490.31 be ātashgāh khwāham raftan imrūz

be kār-i nīk būdan ātash-afrūz

32 khwarish befzāyam ātash-rā be bakhshish

be nīkī u be pākī u be rāmish

'I wish to go today to the 'place of fire',

To become one who illumines fire as a good deed,

I shall increase the fuel for the fire through
liberality,

In goodness, purity and joy.'

It is a characteristic Zoroastrian act of piety to make offerings at a fire temple, so that additional clean, dry wood may be placed by the priests on the sacred fire, which then blazes up in fresh splendour. It is also proper that worshippers should approach a fire with goodness of intention, in ritual purity, and in a spirit of joy. (All Zoroastrian religious acts should be performed joyfully, and the Zoroastrian word yasna, MP jashn 'act of worship', has come to mean 'feast' or 'celebration' in Muslim Iran). It is also a pious and fitting act to render thanks at a fire-temple for such a thing as recovery from illness. So Zard is deceived by Vīs:

p.490.33 sepahbad gōft shāyad hamchunīn kun
hamīshe nām nīk u kār-i dīn kun

'The general said: "That is proper, do so,
Always do your religious duty and gain good
reputation.'

Vīs accordingly leaves the castle, accompanied by her ladies and goes

p.491.35 bedarvāze be ātash-gāh-i khorshīd
ke būd az kardehā-yi shāh jamshīd

'To the Darvāze, to the 'place of fire' of the Sun,
Which was one of the creations of King Jamshīd.'

There are several points of interest here, which are hardly brought out in the English translation, 'through the gates to

the temple of the sun, one of the buildings of King Jamshid'²²; for the construction of the Persian verse suggests that darvāze and ādashgāh are both the object of Vīs' expedition, i.e. in a measure synonymous. In Zoroastrian usage ādashgāh 'place of fire' usually means the inner sanctuary of a fire-temple, where the sacred fire is actually installed; but Gurgani regularly uses the term for the fire-temple itself. The general term used by Zoroastrians in the Islamic period for their fire-temples is Dar-i Mihr, 'Gate of Mihr'. In Persian the common noun mihr can be a synonym for khoshīd, 'sun'; and it seems possible that, in the interests of rhyme and metre, Gurgani has simply expanded the term, rendering 'dar' by darvāze', and then glossing it by 'ādashgāh-i khoshīd', with khoshīd replacing 'mihr'. This is of course quite unjustifiable, since 'Mihr' in the Zoroastrian phrase represents the yazata Mihr; but khoshīd rhymes conveniently with 'Jamshid'.

Fire-Temples (ādashgāh)

Fire-temples were evidently not as numerous in the Parthian period as in Sasanian times; but the existence of a number of them is attested then, and it would not be surprising if there had actually been one in the city of Marv. There is a general tendency among Zoroastrians to attribute the creating of ancient things to Jamshid, and the priests of an individual sacred fire naturally sometimes sought to exalt it by claiming for it (though not for its building) a remote antiquity. Thus according to one tradition the chief sacred

fire of Persia (Pars) was established by Jam (Jamshid).²³ This fire was called Ādur Farnbāg, but its name occurs in various forms in Islamic times, such as Khurreh, Khurdād. This fire is several times linked in the Shāhnāme with the great Parthian fire, Ādur Burzēn Mihr, whose name likewise appears in a variety of ways, adapted to fit the demands of metre. The two fires appear together in Vīs u Rāmīn also, used (as recurrently in the Shāhnāme) in a metaphor. Here Rāmīn says of Vīs:

p.110.33 bedān zādast pendārī ze mādar
ke ātash bar kashad az haft kishvar
 34 be khāsse zīn del-i bad-bakht rāmīn
ke ātashgāh-i khurdād ast u burzīn

'She seems to have been born of her mother

To attract fire from the seven regions (i.e. the
 whole world).

Especially from the heart of ill-fated Rāmīn

Which is the 'place of fire' of Khurdād and Burzīn.'

The metaphor means, of course, that the fire in Rāmīn's heart is so great that he compares it to the very greatest of sacred fires. The reference to 'fire from the seven regions' is wholly Zoroastrian, with the concept of this world being divided into seven keshvars, Avestan karshvar; so that in these lines Gurgani is likely to have been following his original closely.

Ādur Burzēn-Mihr was established, according to tradition, on a spur of Mt. Rēvand, in Khorasan (ancient Parthia); and at the very end of the poem, when Vīs at last dies, Rāmīn has a tomb made for her on the mountain 'above the fire temple of Burzīn', (bar āvarde az ātashgah-i Burzīn).²⁴ He himself yields his throne to their son, Khorshīd, and retires to the fire-temple:

p.510.17 dar ātashgah mujāver gasht u benshast

del-i pākīze bā yazdān be payvast

'He entered the service of the fire temple,

And united his pure heart with God.'

The Muslim term mujāver, 'one appointed to the service of a shrine', seems aptly used here to convey the sense of a person living in a religious sanctuary and serving it. In later times, according to one source, Ardashir I similarly resigned his throne to his son Shābuhr and spent his last years at a fire-temple.

The fire-temple thus fills the same natural part in the social and religious world of the poem as the mosque in Islamic society, or the church in a Christian one; and if we return to Vīs, who has attended such a place of worship with far from pure intent, we find her making lavish offerings there, as befitted a queen:

p.491.36 che māye rīkht khūn-i gōsfandān

bebakhshīd ān hame bar darmandān

37 che māye jāme vu gōhar bar afshānd

che māye sayl-i sīm u zar ze kaf rānd

'She had great numbers of sheep slaughtered,
All of which she bestowed on the sick and the poor.
She gave away great quantities of clothing and
jewellery,
A great flood of silver and gold she poured down
from her hands.'

This lavishness had the outward show of being in pious gratitude for her brother's recovered health; but it might also be implied that Vīs was seeking pardon of the divine beings for her deception of Zard, and help from them in the coming endeavour. She remained at the temple till night fall, we are told. Then Rāmīn and his men met her there, and returned with her to the castle, disguised as her female attendants, whom she had dismissed. Once within the castle, they attacked its defenders, and Zard and many others were killed. Not long after this, Mōbad too died, from an attack by a wild boar, and Vīs became the wife and queen of Rāmīn, who succeeded to the throne. She bore him children, and lived to see those children's children.

When Vīs died, the dakhma or tomb which Rāmīn built for her, high on the mountain side, is said to have been very lofty, 'the tops of its pavilion made to ascend to the Pleiades' (p.508.36). Granted the epic exaggeration, this account of a large mountain sepulchre accords with descriptions of some Sasanian royal tombs,²⁵ while the location, in the neighbourhood of Ādur Burzēn Mihr, is truly Parthian.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. See Boyce, HZ I, 294 ff.
2. Pahlavi Vendidad, XVI, 325, 329, 338.
Arda Viraz Namag, LXXVI, 6-7.
Šayast ne-šayast, 101-2.
3. See above, p.22.
4. See above, p.25.
5. Biruni, Athar ul-baqiyah, transl. A. Dana Seresht, Tehran, 1352/1973, 542.
6. Arda Viraz Namag, v, 5.
7. Shāhnāme, 481.
8. So Morrison, 133.
9. Unvala, Rivayat, I, 46; Dhabhar, Rivayat, 46-47.
10. Unvala, Rivayat, I, 46; Dhabhar, Rivayat, 47.
11. Morrison, 133: 'What is the difference between taking an oath and taking cold water?' (although in a note he explains the original meaning of sōgand khwardan).
12. Shāhnāme, I, 481.
13. p.35.47.
14. p.35.49.
15. See above p.13.
16. Morrison appears to read be muhr, and translates the half-line (p.48): 'Asseverations with sign and seal and oath.'
17. Morrison, 157.
18. cf. p.143.162, where Vīs prays to God to keep her body 'bright' (rōshan), i.e., 'pure' as long as she lives, whereas on p.510.32 the poet says of Ramin, at his death: be yazdān dād jān-i pāk shūste ('He gave up to God his pure-washed soul').

19. Cf. the following words uttered by Rāmīn, p.332.52:
bekwardam bā gul-i gul-būy sōgand
be goft-i farrokh u jān-i khradmand
 'I swore an oath to flower-fragrant Gul,
 By the auspicious word and wise soul.'
20. Morrison, 144.
21. Morrison, 337: 'my aura of fortune'.
22. Morrison, 337.
23. See GBd., XVIII. 10.
24. Morrison, 349: 'raised from the fire-temple of Burzin'.
25. For references see A. Sh. Shahbazi, 'The Irano-Lycian Monuments', Tehran 1975, 154-7.

CHAPTER FIVE

Rāmīn

Rāmīn, the hero of the poem, is a royal prince and brother to Mōbad. He is represented as having all the splendid qualities which Mōbad seems to lack. He is very handsome¹; and when the nurse has been won to plead his cause with Vīs, she speaks of him in the following terms:

- p.128.68 be marv andar basī dīdam javānān
dalīrān-i jihān keshvar gushāyān
- 69 be bālā hamchu sarv-i jūybārī
be chehre hamchu bāgh-i nōbahārī
- 70 ze khūbī u dalīrī āfarīde
be mardī az jihānī bar guzīde
- 71 khraḍmandān ke īshān rā bebīnand
yekāyek rā ze vīrō bar guzīnand
- 72 vaz īshān shīr-mādī kāmrānīst
kujā dar har hunar gūyī jihānīst
- 73 gar īshān akhtarand ū āftābīst
var īshān anbarand ū mushg-i nābīst
- 74 be tokhme tā be ādam shāh u mehtar
be gōhar shāh mōbad rā barādar
- 75 khujaste nām u farrokh bakht rāmīn
fereshte bar zamīn u dīv dar zīn
- 76 be vīrō nīk mānad khūb chehrash
gerōgān shud hame delhā be mīhrash

- p.128.77 dalīrān-i jihān ū rā setāyand
ke rūz-i jang bā ū bar nayāyand
 78 be īrān nīst hamchun ū hunar jūy
shekāfande be jūbīn u senān mūy
 79 be tūrān nīst hamchun ū kamānvar
be farmānash ravande murgh bā par
 80 ze gurdān bīsh gīrad khūn gah-i razm
ze yārān bīsh gīrad may gah-i bazm
 81 be kūshish hamchu shīr-i kīne-dār ast
be bakhshish hamchu abr-i nōbahār ast

'In Marv I have seen many young men,
 Champions of the world, conquerors,
 In stature like a cypress along the stream,
 In looks like a fresh spring garden
 Created out of excellence and courage,
 In manliness superior to the whole world.
 Wise men who saw these [heroes]
 Would choose any one of them over Vīrō.
 And among them there is a lion [like] man, a powerful
 one,
 For he is as accomplished in every way as a whole world.
 If these [men] are stars, he is a sun
 And if these are ambergris, he is pure musk.
 In lineage, back to Adam, kings and dignitaries,
 In birth a brother to King Mōbad.
 Of auspicious name and glorious fortune is Rāmīn.
 An angel on the ground and a demon in the saddle.

His beautiful face is very like Vīrō's.
All hearts are pledged in covenant to his love,
Brave champions of the world praise him
For on the day of battle they cannot match him.
In Iran there is no-one as accomplished as he
In splitting a hair with spear and javelin.
In Turan there is no archer like him,
Having in his command the bird flying with wings.
In battle he spills more blood than [his fellow]
champions,
In feasts he takes more wine than his friends.
In strife he is like an angry lion,
In liberality he is like a spring cloud.

It might possibly be thought that Rāmīn is the offspring of a khwedōdah marriage between his mother and his brother Mōbad, if one were to take literally what his mother says to Mōbad, at the height of his enmity with Rāmīn: to rā rāmīn barādar hast u farzand (p.237.63) 'Rāmīn is brother to you and son'. This appears, however, to be metaphorical, an expression of a mother's anxiety over the younger son, who is also next in line to the throne. She says (p.184.19) to rā īzad nadādest īch farzand - ke rūzī bar jihān bāshad khudāvand. 'God has not given you any children (sons), so that he may some day be lord of the world'. And Rāmīn, complaining to his mother of Mōbad's attempt to kill him, says:

'He is not the firmament or the moon or the sun,
For he is of the same mother and father as I am.'

Rāmīn's qualities are very much those of a Shāhnāme hero, but Rāmīn, as the hero of a romantic epic, adds to them gifts as poet and lover. He is also said to be skilled in playing the harp, and there are many occurrences in the poem when he is called upon by Mōbad to sing to him. Some of the finest lines in the whole epic are attributed to him. Some of these, inevitably, celebrate the love he has felt for Vīs from the first moment that he beheld her, as for example the following:

- p.214.19 shekofte bāgh dīdam nobahārī
sezā-yi ān ke dar vay mihr kārī
 20 ravande sarv dīdam būstani
sukhanvar māh dīdam āsmānī

 23 sepurdam del be mihrash jāvdanī
ze har kārī guzīdam bāghbānī

'I saw a spring garden in bloom,
One fit for sowing the seed of love.
I saw a moving cypress come from the garden,
I saw an eloquent moon come from the sky,
[And] entrusted my heart to her love for ever.

Of all professions I chose that of a gardener.'

Rāmīn is completely overwhelmed by the love which he feels for Vīs, and this love is so powerful that it brings this otherwise perfect hero into a position of scandal and disgrace. His

brother Mōbad becomes his enemy, and his friends are troubled at the blame which attaches to him. Yet the poet gives the impression that Rāmīn's essential goodness is not affected, and that he is never deserted by the 'divine glory' (farr-i yazdān). This should accompany all just rulers, and even Mōbad is said to have it at the spring celebration at the beginning of the poem, where he makes a pact with Shahrō; but it is barely mentioned again for him. Rāmīn, however, has it already in his youth, as the following lines tell:

p.146.227 javān u chabuk u rādu sukhān-dān

bar ū paydā nishān-i farr-i yazdān

'Young, agile, liberal and eloquent

The divine glory apparent on him (on his face).'

And he has it still at the end of the epic, when he rides into the camp where Mōbad has been killed:

p.502.23 buzurgān pīsh-i ū raftand yeksar

be dayhīdash bar afshāndand gōhar

24 marū rā jomle shāhanshāh khwāndand

ze farr u dād ū khīre be-māndand

'The great ones all went to his presence

[And] scattered jewels to [celebrate] his crown;

One and all pronounced him King,

All amazed at his glory (farr) and his justice.'

The concept of the divine khwarenah (MP farrah, farr) which attends a man morally worthy to be king is found in the Avesta. There khwarenah deserts King Yima (Jamshīd)² when he utters a lie; and how Rāmīn can continue to possess it despite

his seduction of Vīs and his continual deception of his brother, could perhaps be explained by the operation of a superior justice, since Mōbad, the ruling king, had acted very wrongly, first in making the pact with Shahrō and then in carrying off Vīs through bribery and guile.

Rāmīn is faithful. He is a party to several of the many pacts or solemn vows which recur through the poem, and he only once falters in loyalty to his pledged word. That is when he yields to the urging of friends and tries to end his affair with Vīs by plunging into marriage with another woman, Gul, in a distant part of Iran; and then the sight of a bunch of violets (banafshe) is enough to remind him of his promise to Vīs, who had given him a bunch when they first swore to be faithful to each other:

p.159.81 be rāmīn dād yek daste banafshe

be yādam dār goftā īn hamīshe

82 kujā bīnī banafshe tāze bar bār

az in paymān u in sōgand yād ār

'She gave Rāmīn a bunch of violets,

Saying "always remember me with this,

Wherever you see violets growing fresh in bloom,

Remember this pact and this oath".'

Rāmīn sets out at once to return to Marv (Gul, like Vīrō, being the victim of faithfulness to an earlier pledge). There he comes at night and stands in the deep snow beneath Vīs' window, ardently pleading to be forgiven his desertion of her. She keeps him remorselessly waiting there, while heaping reproaches

on him, until he says:

p.420.128 be ātash-gāh mīmānad darūnam

be kūh-i barf mīmānad burūnam

'Inside I am like a place of fire,

Outside like a mountain of snow.

This simile is wholly Zoroastrian, with the warm love within him being compared to the glow of a sacred fire. He also (p.442.516) uses the distinctive Zoroastrian term patyāre (Pahl. patyārag), meaning properly an assault by the Evil Spirit, to describe the two threats to his existence: the implacability of Vīs, assailing his soul, and the cold assailing his body. At last he despairs of Vīs' forgiveness and rides away, as he thinks, rejected. Vīs, remorseful, at once runs after him through the snow, but it is now his turn to be haughty and unyielding:

p.464.234 gerō bastand barf u khashm-i rāmīn

ke na ān kam shavad tā rūz na īn

'The snow and Rāmīn's anger were pledged

That neither of the two will subside till dawn.'

And in fact it is not until dawn breaks that the two lovers are at last reconciled, and return together to the castle unobserved.

Rāmīn's anger here compared to snow (barf) is a reflection of another comparison which Rāmīn himself makes:

p.420.129 chu man bar āsman khwad yek fereshtast

ke īzad zātash u barfash sereshtast

'Like me there is an angel in heaven

Whom God has moulded out of fire and snow.'

Here, it seems, a religious association is intended. Vāyu's associate, Rāman, the 'hamkār' of Mithra, is linked with life and death. The names Rāmīn and Rāman are both often shortened to Rām, and this perhaps made possible an association between hero and yazata, and perhaps also accounts for Rāmīn being considered khujaste nām, 'of auspicious name'.

The use of the simile of a pact between anger and the snow also reflects the preoccupation (probably that of the Parthian minstrel poets) with the themes of pacts and pledged words which runs through the poem. The belief is clear that the breaking of a pact, whether deliberate or through forgetfulness, brings sorrow and suffering. Pacts were regularly sworn to with invocation of Mithra: and it seems fitting that it should be in connection with the faithful Rāmīn, 'one whose soul is blended with loyalty' kasī kūrā vafā bā jān sereshtast (p.420.132) that we should consider in more detail the covenant, mihr and the great yazata who guards it, as they appear in the poem.

mihr/Mihr in Vīs u Rāmīn

The fact has been touched on in the introductory chapter that the ancient meaning of the common noun mihr, is largely lost in Gurgani's Persian rendering of the poem, because this word exists in the modern language almost exclusively with the derivative meanings of 'sun' (which it had developed

already by Parthian times), and 'love', 'affection'. Both these meanings are well attested in Vīs u Rāmīn, as for example in the following lines:

p.240.16 betābad mihr bar rūy-i chu māhat

neshīnad gard bar zulf-i syāhat

'[Lest] the sun might shine on your moon-like face,
And dust might sit on your black hair.'

p.299.66 hame mihrī ze nā-dīdan bekāhad

ke rā dīde nabīnad del nakhwāhad

'All love will diminish through not seeing,
One who is not seen by the eye will not be sought by
the heart.'

There seems no single occurrence in the poem of the word mihr meaning 'pact, covenant', nor is this meaning of the simple word attested even in Pahlavi. (Even in Avestan the common noun mithra is rare.) But there occurs several times a compound adjective bad-mihr, which appears to be the Persian rendering of the Pahlavi drūj-mihr, mihr-drūj, meaning 'of bad covenant, false to the covenant, faithless'. There is also an abstract bad-mihrī 'faithlessness'. In the English translation these words are understood to mean 'of bad love, badness in love', and are rendered accordingly, the passages thereby losing their ethical force. One example of the word has already been cited, where Vīs wishes, in bitter irony, that she had a heart as 'black, rebellious and faithless (bad-mihr)' as Rāmīn's.³ Other examples are as follows:

p.492.52 chu shab tārīk shud chun jān-i bad-mihr

....

'When the night grew dark as the soul of a faithless
man.'⁴

p.454.62 be khashm andar bekun lakhtī mudārā
makun bad-mihrī-yi khwīsh āshkārā

'In anger have some patience,
Do not reveal your faithlessness.'⁵

P.457.111 to-rā del sīr gasht az mihrabānī
cherā chandīn marā bad-mihr khwānī

112 ze bad-mihrī nishān tō bīsh dārī
ke bī-rahmī u zaftī kīsh dārī

'Your heart has become sated with affection,
Why do you so often call me faithless?
It is you yourself who bear the marks of faithlessness,
For your religion is mercilessness and meanness.'⁶

Here there is an interesting link between being bad-mihr and having wickedness as one's religion. The broad ethical implication of the term is thus well brought out.

As for Mihr himself, yazata of fidelity, it is to be expected that Gurgani would not deliberately name him, since it is evident that in general he omits the names of individual yazatas, though he keeps the moral and religious spirit (the appearance of Srōsh's name serves only to illustrate this, since his name, as we have seen, is treated by Gurgani as a common noun meaning 'angel'.) But the fact that mihr has in

Persian the meaning of 'love, affection', brings it about that sometimes Gurgani seems to have taken the yazata's name as the common noun, and so has let it survive in his text. We have already met one example of this, where 'Caesar', having broken his treaty obligations, is said to have 'left the path of Mihr',⁷ an expression which could be understood by a modern reader (as by the English translator) to mean 'the path of affection'. Another line which may well represent a similar misunderstanding by Gurgani of the Pahlavi is the following:

p.103.27 sepāh-i dīv-i jādū bar to rah yāft
to rā az rāh-i dādu mihr bar tāft

'The forces of the sorcerer-Div found their way into
you,

And turned you from the way of justice and of Mihr.'⁸

The whole concept and terminology here is strikingly Zoroastrian, with dīv and yazad contending for the hearts of men.

In other passages it seems likely that Gurgani, meeting the name of the yazad Mihr unambiguously in the Pahlavi, has simply omitted it, retaining only the general word yazad (as izad), or the title of Dāvar 'judge', as in the following lines:

p.509.13 har ānch īzad ze man pursad be mahshar
man az to nīz pursam pīsh-i dāvar

'All that the yazad questions me about on Judgement Day
I too shall question you about before the judge.'

Here Rāmīn alludes to the Zoroastrian beliefs that each soul will go at death before Mithra the judge, and also the fravašis

of men watch over their descendants on earth, and take note of their deeds.

On occasion, as we have seen,⁹ the monotheist Gurgani seems in his translation to equate Zoroastrian Dāvar with Dādār, i.e. with Ohrmazd. So the following line may also well have referred in the Pahlavi original to Mihr (with again, Mihr in the original probably being misunderstood by him as mihr 'affection').

p.70.28 vagar bā ū khwaram dar mihr zinhār
che uzr āram bedān sar pīsh-i dādār

'If I break my word in 'mihr' with him,
What excuse shall I offer on the other side before the
Creator?'

One can compare with this lines from the Farziyāt Nāma of the Parsi priestly scholar, Darab Pahlān,

p.21.2 nabāshad hāsel ū-rā savābash
nayārad mihr-i dāvar dar hesābash

'He would gain no recompense for them (his good deeds),
Mihr the Judge will not bring them into his accounts.'¹⁰

There is also a simile in the poem which arises from the Zoroastrian association of Mihr the Judge and the fire of the judicial ordeal:

p.434.373 be tō nālam ke dar del āzarī to
be tō nālam ke bar del dāvāri to

'To you I complain since you are the fire in my heart.
To you I complain for you are the judge over my heart.'

There thus appears, veiled behind ^{the} words of the Muslim poet, but still faintly discernible, the pervading presence of Mihr, invisible guardian of the many pacts which are made as the epic unfolds.

At the very end of the poem Mōbad, as we have seen, dies through wounds given him by a wild boar, so that Rāmīn is spared the sin of himself slaying the king. Rāmīn then enters on a reign which is to be characterised by justice:

p.504.55 chu rāmīn dād-jūy u dād gar shud

jihān az murdegān āsudetar shud

56 sepahdārān-i ū har jā ke raftand

be farr-i ū hame gītī gereftand

....

59 hame vīrānehā ābād kardand

hezārān shahr u deh bunyād kardand

....

68 be dāvar-gah nishāndī dāvarān rā

bekandī bīkh u bun bad-gōharān rā

69 be dāvar gāh-i ū bar shāh u chākar

yekī būdī u darvīsh u tavāngar

'As Rāmīn was just and a seeker of justice,

The world became more peaceful than [the world of] the
dead.

His generals, wherever they went,

Through his glory conquered all the world.

....

They rebuilt all ruins
And founded thousands of towns and villages .

....

He appointed judges in the court of justice
And eradicated all those of bad character.
In his court of justice king and servant
Were equal, as were rich and poor.'

Thus Rāmīn reigns for many years, the pattern of an ideal Zoroastrian ruler, until at last, as we have seen, having laid Vīs in her tomb high in the mountains, he himself abdicates at Nō Rūz (the traditional date for the beginning of a new reign) in favour of his elder son. He spends the last three years of his life in pious retirement at the greatest of the Parthian fire-temples, Ādur Burzēn Mihr; and finally he too dies, and his body is laid in the same 'dakhma' as that of Vīs.¹¹

One of Mithra's most striking companions in his ancient yasht is Verethraghna, yazata of Victory, who hastens before him in the shape of a wild boar, ready to gore and crush wicked men.¹² The boar is Verethraghna's most familiar manifestation; and it seems very probable that it is in this shape that he plays a part at the very end of the story. Rāmīn has then at last carried off Vīs, and Mōbad is reluctantly preparing to engage him in battle; but he does so with a troubled heart, since (as we have seen already¹³), he fears that Sorūsh will not give him support. Indeed, he seems to foresee Rāmīn's victory:

p.497.13 javān ast ū vu ham bakhtash javān ast
derakht-i dōlatash tā āsmān ast

'He is young and his fortune is young,

The tree of his fortune is as high as the sky.'

He thus sees Rāmīn as attended by Khvarenah, who is linked with Fortune (Ashi/Bakht¹⁴), and who like Verethraghna is associated with the Ahuras, since he is good only to the righteous.

Despite his forebodings, Mōbad gathers his forces, and encamps at a place bounded on one side by a river (jūybār).¹⁵ From an angle of this river there suddenly leaps out a wild boar 'swift as a wild and maddened elephant' (be tundi hamchu pili sharze vu mast).¹⁶ It dashes into the camp, causing a hubbub. Mōbad mounts his horse, and rides to meet it. The boar gores his horse, bringing beast and rider to the ground; and then it kills the king with a single deadly thrust of its tusks. No one else is hurt, and there is no reason given for the great creature's sudden appearance and onslaught. It is perhaps even significant that he springs out from a river-bed, for water is the element of Varuna, 'The Ahura', and, Verethraghna is Ahuradhāta, i.e. 'created by the Ahura'.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. See p.108.5 ff.
2. Yt.19.6.34.
3. See above, p.43.
4. Morrison, 337: 'as the soul of a false lover'.
5. Morrison, 312: 'Leaven your anger with a dash of concilliation: do not reveal abroad your shortcomings in love'.
6. Morrison, 314: 'lacking in love ... false love'.
7. See above, p.60.
8. Morrison, 71: 'seduced you from the road of justice and love'.
9. See above, p.32.
10. Farziyat Nama-i Darab Pāhlan, 2.
11. p.509.1 ff.
12. Yt.10.70-72.
13. See above, p.33.
14. See above, p.37.
15. p.499.26: Morrison, 345 'marsh'.
16. p.499.27.

CHAPTER SIX

The Nurse

The Nurse (dāye), whose proper name is not known, has had the rearing of Vīs (and also, in his infancy, of Rāmīn); and she remains in Vīs' service throughout the unfolding of the story, in which she plays an important part. She is from Khūzān, which V. Minorsky thought to be probably a place in the neighbourhood of Qūchān in Khorāsān.¹ Mōbad seems to associate her with 'Bābel', when he says to Vīs 'be bābel dīv būde ūstādat' 'a dīv was your teacher in Babylon' (p.173.42); but this meant simply to imply that the Nurse had been trained in astrology and occult sciences. His opinion of Khūzān is no better, however, for he declares:

p.163.22 ze khūzān khwad nayāyad juz bad-andīsh
tabāhī-jūy u bad-kirdār u bad-kīsh

'None hails from Khūzān but the malevolent,
 Subverters, evil-doers and heretics.'

All concerned utter at times harsh words to the Nurse. The princess Gul, whom Rāmīn marries only to desert her, blames Rāmīn's love for Vīs on the Nurse's witchcraft. Mōbad continually abuses her. Rāmīn curses her when she goes on Vīs' orders to persuade him to come back, after he has gone away and married Gul. Vīs herself, though very close to her, does not forget what she is, and declares that she will not sin herself,

p.140.104 ze bahr-i dāye-yi bī sharm u bī dīn

be dāde har dō gitī rā be rāmīn

'For the sake of a shameless, irreligious nurse

Who has given away both worlds to Rāmīn.'

On the same occasion she says wrathfully to the Nurse:

p.138.76 ze shahr-i tō nayāyad juz bad-akhtar

ze tokhm-i tō nayāyad juz fosūngar

77 agar zāyand az ān tokhme hezārān

hame dīvan buvand u bādsārān

'From your town comes none but the ill-fated,

From your seed comes none but the caster of spells.

If thousands are born of that seed,

All will be dīvs and empty-headed.'

p.138.83 az īzād sharm bādā mādaram rā

ke kard ālūde vīže gōharam rā

84 marā dar dast-i chun to jādū-i dād

ke bā tō nīst sharm u dānish u dād

'May my mother repent before God

For having stained my pure heritage.

She placed me in the hands of a sorceress like you,

Who lacks modesty, wisdom and justice.'

p.139.102 be har sānī khudā-yi dānish u dīn

beh az dīvān-i khūzānī u rāmīn

'The God of wisdom and faith is in any case

Better than dīvs from Khūzān, and Rāmīn.'

Vīs repeatedly accuses the Nurse of being bīdīn, 'without religion'. Sharm, 'modesty', dānīsh u dād, 'wisdom and justice', she declares, are lacking in her. Whether this bad character given to the Nurse is actually meant in reference to her personal religion, or is simply a stereotype of her profession is not clear. For the Nurse in 'Yūsef u Zulaykhā' of Jāmi² in the 15th century A.C. is also described as a sorceress and one that brings lovers together; possessing a very moral character would evidently hinder this reprehensible but obviously exciting occupation.

At one point the Nurse is called 'qarche' (p.430.306) where Dehkhuda cites the word and gives the meaning as applying to nomads and uncouth persons in general. Qarches, like gypsies elsewhere, tell fortunes and solve occasional love problems.

Although outwardly a cultivated woman, in accordance with her exalted connections, the Nurse does not seem to have any steady moral principles. Her aim and function in the story is to help Vīs and Rāmīn to be together (though she is not happy about this at first, until she herself has been seduced by Rāmīn and so won to his cause). To this end she will do anything, and her powers are considerable. Thus on one occasion when Vīs is eager to come out and see Rāmīn secretly the Nurse simply murmurs a spell to incapacitate Mōbad:

p.415.37 sabuk dāye fosūnī khwānd bar shāh
to goftī shāh morde gasht bar gāh

'Straightaway the Nurse chanted a spell over the king,

It was as if the king was dead upon the bed.'

In her wordly advice to Vīs the Nurse tells her:

p.141.128 zanān-i mehtarān u nām-dārān

buzurgān-i jihān u kāmgarān

....

130 agar che shōy-i nām-burdār dārān

nihānī dīgarī-rā yār dārān

131 gahī dārān shōy-i naghz dar bar

be kām-i khwīsh u gāhī yār-i delbar

'The wives of the great and the illustrious,

Lords of the world and those with power to gratify

their wishes,

....

Even though they have famous husbands,

In secret they have another man as lover.

Now they have their sweet husbands in their arms,

At their desire, and now a beloved lover.'

In this respect, i.e. in exempting the great and the illustrious from any moral code, the Nurse resembles Mōbad, and not surprisingly these two share the epithet of jādū. In accordance with her general lack of scruples, she declares to the still virgin Vīs:

p.154.46 gar āmīzesh kunī bā mard yekbār

be jān-i man ke nashkībī azīn kār

'If you have intercourse but once with a man,

Upon my soul, you will never hold back from this act.'

The Nurse speaks of yazdān, that is (in the usage of our Muslim poet) God. She says that if Rāmīn should suddenly die of grief, God would punish her for his death, because she had not won Vīs over to him. But this seems to be an emphatic way of talking rather than representing a genuine fear of God, just as she swears by her soul (jān), without apparently any serious intent. Perhaps she employs religious vocabulary only conventionally, perhaps in order to answer Vīs in her own terms, since the latter is constantly speaking of heaven and hell, behesht and dūzakh. The Nurse herself appears very much as a fatalist. Thus on one occasion Vīs, having by now seen Rāmīn and lost her heart to him, is assessing the prospect of pursuing this love, and is perhaps hoping to be persuaded in favour of it; the Nurse tells her that this is her fate and that she has no choice but to follow 'God's ruling':

p.153.17 to az farmān-i yazdān kay gurīzī
va bā gardūn-i gardān kay setīzī

'When can you escape from God's command,

When can you contend with the turning wheel?'

Gardūn (Parthian and MP wardyūn) and charkh, both meaning 'wheel', that is, the wheel of fortune, the astronomical sphere, in general play the same role as yazdān in the Nurse's speeches, as in the following verses:

p.132.144 ze charkh āyad qadhā naz kām-i mardom
azīrā bande āmad nām-i mardom

....

147 ze charkh āyad hame chīzī nivishte
nivishte bā ravān-i mā sereshte

p.133.169 qadha gar bar to rānad mihrabānī

nabāshad juz qadhā-yi āsmānī

'Fate comes from the wheel of fortune, not from man's
will,

That is why man is called 'slave'.

....

Everything written has come from the wheel of fortune,
The writ is worked into our souls.

....

If fate decrees that you should love,

It is nothing but your fate decreed by heaven.'

Earlier she has said with worldly wisdom: .

p.127.53 be rāmish dār del rā tā tavānī

ke dō rūz ast mā rā زنداغانی

....

55 buvaḍ shādīsh yeksar andoh-āmigh

napāyad dīr hamchun sāye-yi mīgh

'Keep your heart joyful while you may,

For life for us lasts but two days.

....

Its happiness is always mixed with sorrow,

It lasts no longer than the shadow of a cloud.'

The emphasis on the actions of fate, and on the shortness of man's days, is characteristic of epic poetry, and is marked in the Shāhnāme. But helplessness in guiding one's own actions is no part of Zoroastrian belief, since that faith lays great stress on man's power and duty to choose to act,

and to act well. The fact that the workings of fate are spoken of in Vīs u Rāmīn chiefly by the Nurse thus seems one more characteristic setting her apart from the others in the story. They, whatever their failings, subscribe to Zoroastrian ideals and ethical standards. She is a woman, it seems, without firm religious convictions, an outsider, one with mysterious powers. She is represented as genuinely and warmly attached to both Vīs and Rāmīn, and as moved by a primitive conviction that they, being young, handsome and noble, should be brought together, to enjoy happiness while they can. But since she does not concern herself with questions of sin, or with heaven and hell, she seems, in this Zoroastrian society, to be indeed one touched with wickedness, a representative almost of the dark world of Ahriman.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

1. Minorsky, 'V u R I', 759.

2. Jami, 43.17-19:

az ān jomle fosūngar dāye-ī dāsht
ke az afsūngarī samāye-ī dāsht
be rāh-i āsheqī kār āzmūde
gahī āsheq gahī ma'shūq būde
be ham vaslat deh-i ma'shūq u āsheq
movāfeq sāz-i yār-i nā movāfeq

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Y: Yasna.

Yt: Yasht.

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